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By
R.E. FRANCILLON.



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QUEEN COPHETUA

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BY

R. E. FRANCILLON

AUTHOR OF 'OLYMPIA' ETC.



IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.

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1880

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QUEEN COPHETUA.

CHAPTER XII.

As some dull wanderer, to enlarge his mind
With wider wisdom, leaves his home behind,
And, having journeyed half the countries o'er,
Finds everywhere himself, and nothing more—
So he who, for the first of all his days,
Lost on Love's Island, treads undreamed-of ways :
Who, all unlettered in that country's tongue,
Hears the birds sing, but doth not know the song—
He, if he knew not, ere he crossed the sea,
What herbs are sweet, and what taste bitterly,
Will only find, for all he seeketh well,
His home-born rue mid meads of asphodel.

NOBODY ever carried away distrust from a second look at Gideon Skull. As for Helen, she saw at once that this big, broad-shouldered, burly Briton, with his grave, frank smile and straight, open eyes, was made by nature to tell everything that he knew about anything to any woman who cared to ask him. She almost smiled at herself for having

surrounded him, in her thoughts, with an atmosphere of mystery, and for ever having suspected a man like this of foul play instead of his foppish and plausible friend. Yes, there was no doubt about it; not even a second look was needed to prove Gideon Skull a man cut out for being turned by a clever friend round his wrist, and by any woman round her little finger. All women's instincts are always right—at least all the world says so; they are as infallible as first impressions, and as true as the characters that nature writes on men's faces in large capitals.

She could see that he lacked the intangible and indefinable part of the look and bearing of a gentleman; but that was nothing. Indeed, it was to his credit, for no finished gentleman could have associated with Victor Waldron without being a finished scoundrel besides. And a certain want of grace and polish was not unbecoming in one who had made himself by sheer strength, in the teeth of the world. He looked honest and he looked strong, which ought to be enough for any man.

'I am sorry my brother has just gone out,' she began, before her second look was complete, thinking how she could best manage to learn all she wanted, and in how small a number of minutes, while the strange chance was still in her own hands. 'He has told me—how kind you have been to him. Can I give him any message from you ?'

If Helen had known how very long it was since Gideon Skull had found himself in company with a lady, she would not have been quite so ready to put his defects of manner down to natural shyness or any equally innocent cause. It was in truth so long, that he had practically forgotten the look of one, and believed he had an exhaustive knowledge of womankind : just as some of us may think we know the moon, till we chance to remember that she has another side. The side he had seen, and had really learned to know, was that which she turns downwards and earthwards at the full. In the moonlight and limelight of scene-painters he was perfectly at home ; and no woman who was not

also a lady ever suspected Gideon Skull of being a shy man.

‘Then you are Miss Reid?’ asked he.

‘Yes. Won’t you sit down?’

He sat down, for he had a sort of fancy that he did not feel himself quite at home, and he did not approve of the feeling. ‘I’m sorry not to find your brother in—that is to say, I’m not,’ he corrected himself, thinking it necessary to pay some sort of a compliment, and yet feeling that it was both out of place and of the wrong kind. ‘I only called to ask if he could dine with me to-night instead of to-morrow—since we parted in the City, I’ve been at the “Argus” office again, and their man there is in such a hurry to send your brother off that I’ve had to hurry matters. If he has any other engagement to-night, he must put it off, if he possibly can.’

‘I will tell him when he comes in. There is nothing to prevent his coming. . . . Mr. Skull—I’m not used to thanking people for great things; will you let me say just “I thank you,” without trying to say how much——’

'No, I won't, Miss Reid. Nobody need ever thank me for anything. You don't suppose, do you, that I've been putting myself an inch out of the way to serve a man who's an utter stranger to me? I'm glad it's fallen in my way to put your father's son up to a good thing, and all the more glad because it gives me no trouble and costs me nothing. That's all.'

Helen smiled to herself at her own penetration. Of course she took it for granted that, when a man disclaims having taken trouble, it is as certain that he has taken a great deal, as that, when he brags of the pains he has been at, he has taken none. Was he not taking some trouble in making this very call, and in arranging his days and hours for the sake of others? In less than two minutes she had taken the measure of Gideon Skull from head to heel. She was almost disappointed to find in him, instead of a mystery, a plain, rough, simple, good-natured man.

Nor was her measure altogether wrong. With his usual contempt for hypocrisy, he had plainly, roughly, and simply spoken the

truth—that he would not have put himself an inch out of the way to serve any creature but Gideon Skull ; at least, since he had given up serving Victor Waldron. He did not even imagine that she thought so ; and he honestly hated to be thanked, because to profess gratitude to a man is to insult him : it is as much as to say you take him for the fool he would be if he believed you. Of course, thanks, in common cases, might pass as common forms ; but he felt a curious sort of dislike to hearing them from Helen Reid. He had not seen her for more than a moment, or heard her speak more than half-a-dozen words ; he considered himself woman-proof, except when it was his deliberate pleasure to be otherwise ; and yet he felt on the edge of a new discovery. It was that there are two sorts of women in the world, after all ; and that the sort which contains all women on earth excepting one is of no account and not worth knowing, so long as the sort which comprises one, and only one, remains unknown. Gideon Skull had never been in love, except after his fashion—and he was forty years old.

At one look, at one word, over went Gideon Skull as if he had been a boy consciously going out to meet passion nine-tenths of the way. Heaven knows—and not even Heaven knew better than herself—there was little enough of the angel about Helen that the mere sight of her face and the mere sound of her voice should thus startle into life all that in Gideon Skull did duty for a soul. Angels have no enemies ; and, if they have, they do not hate them. But, even at first sight, she was an angel of angels compared with such makeshifts as he had known. It may be that without the dark spot in her heart she would have been in an atmosphere too high above the range of his passion, and that, in some subtle and occult way, it was her worst that made it possible for her best to draw his heart from him. He knew that he saw his highest ; and yet one of those unconscious insights of which every sort of love, from best to worst, is full, told him that his highest was not too high for him. And she was his highest, too, in many more ways than one. It was very far from nothing to

Gideon Skull of Hillswick that she was a Miss Reid of Copleston. He might sneer at Mr. Crowder for worshipping a Duke in the abstract ; he might not know that he looked up to any fellow-mortal ; but he could not help having come from Hillswick, and being a Hillswick man, any more than Mr. Crowder could help coming from Spraggville. Even in her London lodging, Helen was still a Reid of Copleston. She was so different, in look and in bearing, from all those who had taught him to think that he knew all women. Her beauty, whether it were much or little, was her own ; she was natural and at ease, and obviously so little expected him to make any sort of love to her on a first introduction that he scarcely knew how to behave or what to say. For once he had been taken by surprise. And, above all things, he was forty years old —of the age when sentiment has been worn out, and experience has grown wearisome, and passion, if as yet asleep, stretches its limbs and dreams of waking up and entering upon the empty stage.

But, though ashamed of his inability to

find fitting speech or action for this new country of whose language he had never learned the simplest word, he never thought of imposing silence upon his eyes. Love is no such almighty wizard that its first breath can wash off the stains and scalds of forty years. With all her home-nursed ignorance of what some hold all men and women to know by nature, she could not help colouring under the long look in which her plain, rough, simple, 'good-natured man seemed to drink her in. Of course, his manners meant nothing ; one is not angry at the no-manners of a tradesman, who, having made himself, has naturally made himself more or less badly. But her tinge of pink made Gideon's pulse beat hard. In itself it was a charm, and it gave him courage as well as fire. She was so much the one woman in all other things that, in his new-born humility, he had been almost fearing lest she might be the one woman in the whole world whom a man who willed it might not be able to win. But this mere mortal blush reassured him. The only sort of blush he knew of was that which

means warmth of blood when it does not happen to mean rouge.

In spite of the quickness of his desires, he was a slow-minded man ; it took him nearly two whole seconds to grasp a fact for which few men would have needed even so much as one. The good of this was, that he always knew exactly what he wanted, and how, and why. He did not tell himself, in that one second of looking and thinking, that he was a fool for wanting a girl who had been a mere name to him five minutes ago more than he had ever wanted anything—more than money even. He never told even himself what he did not think was absolutely true ; and of course it could not be true that, under any conceivable circumstances, Gideon Skull could be a fool. That second's thought simply saved him from drifting over the edge of a dream. He did not drift or fall : he threw himself over with all his strength and with his eyes open, telling himself that he wanted Helen in his life, and that wanting meant willing, and willing winning, with Gideon Skull. Slow-minded as he was, it did not take him long to see the

advantages that, from his point of view, lay on his side. It was as if she had been given into his hands. In a few hours she would not even have so much as that helpless brother of hers to protect her. She was poor: in a very little while, if his schemes for fortune turned out fairly well, he would be rich enough to buy her, if he could get her in no better way—if there be a better. For, though he had got so far as to put Helen apart from other women, he could not be expected to learn all at once that the difference lay in anything more than that, while the price of women in general is low enough, hers might be inconveniently high. Well, she was worth it. Waldron had not been quite such an idiot, after all, when he had been tempted to sell Copleston for the eyes of Helen Reid. Did the Yankee blackguard think of her still? If so, love for Helen would be sweetened by triumph over Victor Waldron.

‘But it is kind of you, and I do thank you,’ Helen was saying, quite unconscious of her sudden conquest, and almost of her pass-

ing tinge of colour. ‘ You have done more for my brother——’

A great deal had happened since he had first been thanked by Helen. It was no longer true that he was hurrying Alan off to Versailles without reasons for which she ought to feel grateful. ‘ More for your brother than anybody ever did for me? You’re right enough, if you put it that way. I only wish—I only wish I could undo everything that has been done. I wish——’

Helen’s heart began to beat quickly, and the colour came again, but from a very different cause. She had been wondering how she could make him speak of Copleston, and it had been upon his lips until he paused.

‘ Then,’ she said, half eagerly, half guiltily, as she set her foot on the forbidden ground, ‘ then—you do not think right has been done?’

‘ *I*, Miss Reid? *I* think right has been done? Has not your brother told you what *I* think of what has been done?’

‘ No.’

‘ Do you suppose there is a single human

being who thinks that because a man dies without a will, his children should be turned by a stranger out of house and home?"

Helen knew as little of the law of real property as most people; but she had certainly never doubted that, when a man dies without a will, his land goes to his eldest son. Was not this the very point that had been bewildering her? If Gideon went no further than an indignant question based upon a monstrous piece of absurdity, he certainly would not carry her very far towards the root of the mystery. And yet she could not openly ask him to explain, though what kept her back was less loyalty to her brother than the shame of having to say that she had to apply to a stranger for the confidence which her own mother and brother thought fit to withhold from her. She could only wait for him to say more; but he said no more. His thoughts were travelling on a far different road. She had not the least doubt of hearing all, before he had done, from one whose look was growing much more than merely frank and open; but then Mrs. Reid might come

down again from her room at any moment, and the chance might never come back again.

'Mr. Waldron is not a stranger,' she said at last : the remark was just sufficiently called for by what he had said to be worth making as a safe way, without betraying her ignorance, of giving the subject another opening.

'He is an infernal scoundrel !' burst out Gideon, with his whole heart in his voice. He wanted an outlet of some sort, and if it was too soon to make love to Helen Reid, it was not too soon to let her know that her enemies and her hates were his own. He took hate for a bond of sympathy, and, for once, the wise man did not happen to be wrong.

His strong words, and his stronger voice, fell on Helen's unaccustomed ears like a blow. They startled her out of her own timidity ; she had hoped for an instrument, but had never dreamed of an ally, in Gideon Skull. She made a movement forward and, not thinking of what she was doing, held out her hand. 'Then you are not *his* friend as well as ours ?' said she.

He held out his own hand : but hers had

gone back to herself—it had not gone out to be taken. ‘Yes,’ he said, sullen for what felt like an omen that the fruit he wanted must be climbed for and not simply shaken down, ‘of course you have been putting down everything to my score. I was to blame. I believed Victor Waldron an honest man, instead of a cheat and a liar. But I know him now.’

‘I have not wronged him, then?’

‘You could only wrong him by thinking well of him. Ah, Miss Reid,’ he went on, looking at her eager face as a lion might look at an especially attractive lioness, ‘if your brother were like you——’

‘Well? If he were like me——? Do you mean that he has been cheated out of Copleston? Is the law truly on the unjust side? Alan is too noble-minded, if such a thing could be. He would throw away his life—he *has* thrown it away, more than anybody knows but me—rather than strike one blow for it that might be thought unfair. He is *not* like me. I have to fight for him—alone. You are our friend, you are our cousin’s enemy; tell *me* what to do.’

That speech, in that voice, went straight to the inmost soul of Gideon Skull. She had not dreamed of finding an ally in him less than he had dreamed of finding a heroine after his own heart in the sister of a mean-spirited, straw-splitting simpleton like Alan Reid. Why had he never known her before? It cost him no logic to transfer his indignation against Waldron for his own wrongs into equally righteous wrath against him for his treatment of the Reids.

‘Miss Reid,’ he said, ‘you just now wanted to thank me for nothing. Do you know there is simply nothing on earth that I would not do for you?’

He had fallen back into his quietest manner, but for the first time something in it made her look at him with new eyes. A woman is born a woman, after all; she does not need middle-aged experience to be a great deal quicker-minded in some things than Gideon Skull. If the thing had not been too utterly and ridiculously absurd, she would have fancied that the man was thinking of making bearish love at first sight to her. In

the old times she would hardly have been able to keep herself from laughing at such a notion to his face; as things were, she forgot to remember that a penniless nobody had no longer the right to give herself airs before a prosperous somebody like Gideon
37 Skull.

‘That is a rash speech !’ she said. ‘Suppose I were to take you at your word ?’

‘Take me at my word, and see.’

‘You need not be afraid. You have done more for us already than—but you know the way of grateful people ; they like the feeling of gratitude so much that they are always asking for something more to be grateful for. There is something more that you can do for —Alan.’

‘For—Alan ?’ He frowned.

‘For us all. You know our whole story. Tell *me* what can be done for him.’

‘I have done all that can be done for your brother, Miss Reid. Heaven helps those that help themselves. Heaven helps Victor Waldrons, not Alan Reids. Or if not Heaven, something else that does just as well. I can

tell you nothing that can be done for the sake of—Alan.'

There was no mistaking what he meant this time. Its being ridiculous did not make it less a glaring fact that her plain, rough, simple, good-natured man was, in the first ten minutes of a first interview, trying to set up an understanding between them in the name of a common cause, and on the ground of a common hate, that he was to be her knight instead of her brother's friend. Indeed, it was more than ridiculous—it was almost as if he could have guessed that her need of help was so strong, and allowed of such little delay, that she was ready to buy it of him then and there. Chivalry she did not expect from a Gideon Skull: but this looked like downright impudence instead of mere want of manners, and she found herself wondering, almost with shame enough to lose the sense of its absurdity, whether Gideon Skull would have dared thus to speak to Miss Reid of Copleston.

‘ You are Alan’s friend, and I am Alan’s sister,’ she said quickly. ‘ Whatever I do is

for him ; whatever my friends do must be done for him too. His friends are mine, and his enemies are mine. He would be too proud to ask you what I have been asking you. I am proud too. But there is nothing for which I am too proud—for Alan. For myself I want nothing ; nothing in the whole world.'

She meant to put him in his place at once, and sharply. But to him, who had found out at last what he wanted, her words rang like a challenge. He seemed to bow to them—but even so men have to seem to bow when they stoop to lift a glove that has been thrown down before them.

'So be it, then,' he said quietly. ' You and I for him. Victor Waldron is your brother's enemy, therefore he is yours, therefore he is mine. Alan Reid is your brother, therefore he is my friend. It comes to the same thing. You cannot be more anxious than I am to undo this monstrous wrong—partly my own doing, because I trusted a scoundrel : unwillingly enough, God knows. Your brother does me that justice : you will not do me less than he.'

‘ Only tell me one thing—can it be undone?’

Gideon paused long before he answered. He was not more sure that he loved Helen Reid, after his manner, than that a more prodigious and incomprehensible piece of injustice had been done than anybody, who does not know the infinite caprices of men and women through and through, could guess or dream. He was not surer of the real emptiness of his purse, which he chose everybody to believe so full, than he was that old Harry Reid had not been so mad as to die without a will. Supreme, indeed, must be the faith in Uncle Christopher that imagines him capable of keeping a possibly profitable secret from his nephew Gideon ; strange the disbelief in Gideon’s order of talent that would suppose the slightest hint of such a secret to be thrown away upon him. The curate of Hillswick was sorely burdened in mind : and there are hundreds of ways in which such a mind as his will contrive to relieve itself, without any approach to making confidences or to open confession. Whatever Mrs. Reid’s mo-

tives might be at bottom, he had certainly got hold of a family secret of the first order : if he could only lay his hand upon that will, he felt that he ought to be able to make a very good thing out of Alan Reid by gratifying a just vengeance against Victor Waldron. Victor Waldron had cheated him, therefore it was monstrously unjust that he should keep Alan Reid out of Copleston ; but to play the part of king-maker for nothing could not enter the head of a sane man. Nobody else would do so ; why should Gideon Skull ? He had been a little thrown out in his calculations by Alan's extraordinary way of receiving as broad a hint as prudence had allowed him to make of the existence of a will, and of his readiness to sell to the rightful heir the services for which he had not been paid by the wrongful one. But Victor himself had taught him that quixotic professions simply mean a determination under no circumstances whatever to see what one does not wish to see ; to be very angry if an agent is so indelicate and so inconsiderate as to throw upon his principal the responsibility for all the means that re-

quire to be justified by their end. That Alan, being human, would accept Copleston if he could—so long as he was allowed to ask no questions—Gideon was sure: and that he would not be allowed to repeat Waldron's trick of getting it back for nothing, Gideon was equally sure. All—assuming, as a matter of course, that to know of the existence of a will implied its discovery—had been as clear as daylight ten minutes ago. But these ten minutes' talk with Helen compelled him to pause and to think with all his might before risking another word.

'If I tell her right off all I think,' thought he, following out his views of human nature to their thorough end, 'she is clever enough to pay me with a "Thank you," even if she doesn't get rid of me by treating me like that scoundrel. She's sharp enough to worm it all out for herself if I were to let out to her as much as half a word. If I were a woman I should have known as much as Uncle Christopher long ago. . . . If I don't tell her something I shall seem of no use, and women don't give something for nothing. . . . And if I tell

her half a word, where's the good gone of packing that brother of hers off out of the way, and of having her poor enough for buying? . . . Why, if some chance bullet found its way to her brother's skull before that will turned up, I might be owner of all Copleston . . . Ah, I'm not such an ass after all; I thought there must be something more about a girl than her mere flesh and blood to make me want her, as if there were no she-flesh in the world but hers. . . . If young Reid doesn't get killed, his only sister would not make the man who married her a beggar's husband, unless the will's very unlike any that old Harry would have drawn. . . .

‘Can it *not* be undone?’ asked Helen. ‘Must Alan put up with what you tell me all the world would think unjust because some lawyer’s quibble is against him? How can anybody but he—how can anybody on earth come between his father and him?’

‘I did not say it could not be undone,’ said Gideon. ‘Of course Victor Waldron was a scoundrel beyond words to take advantage of your father’s sudden death without a will.

If he had gone for Copleston on what he thought were his rights, I should have said nothing; he would have had right as well as law on his side, and you can't blame a man for trying to get his own. But—'

'There is no occasion to abuse anybody,' said Helen. 'Tell me what can be done; and if Alan ought not to do it, I will.'

'Anything in the world?'

'Anything in the world. I know what I am saying, Mr. Skull. I have thought about it ever since. I have no right to think of myself; I should despise myself if I let any selfish scruple about what it was proper for me to do ruin Alan. I would not talk like this if it were only Copleston.'

Gideon nodded assent a little impatiently. Why should people persist in the humbug of making these conventional disclaimers, which they knew could deceive nobody, of being moved by the only motives that are natural, healthy, and sane? Well, she was a woman—it would not do to expect too much from her.

'But it is not only that—it is Alan's life,

not his land. If we must fight them in their own way, *he* must not use their weapons. I would not have my brother do one least thing that he might for one moment dream of being against his honour. Rather than that, I would have him lose all that Copleston means to him. But rather than see him lose his rights by deserving them, I would do everything that I would not have him do. Anything — everything. Do you understand? Don't tell me that right is right, and wrong is wrong. I know that as well as you. I suppose I am talking what some people would call wickedly. I should call it far more wicked to think more of one's own selfish soul, which is of no consequence to any creature but oneself, before right and justice, and the life and happiness of Alan. Tell me everything that anybody can do for him.'

She was not giving any special confidence to Gideon. She was only letting Alan's well-wisher and Waldron's enemy see that he might place implicit confidence in her, and might, without fear of finding any of Alan's scruples, count upon her as a thorough-going

ally. She was not even defending herself to herself, for her self-defence had been put beyond doubt or question long ago. If she was right, she was right ; if she was wrong, it was all for Alan. Her voice, as it grew in courage and eagerness, sent a thrill through Gideon, and made his heart beat and his blood burn as if twenty years of his life had been suddenly startled away. A girl who felt thus for a brother—what would she not feel and do for the man who could make her love him with the whole passion which he felt sure was waiting for but a single spark to set it ablaze ? Why, without a dower, what would not a girl like this help him to do, so soon as she learned to be no longer a girl ? And all this wasted on a brother!—but that should not be for long. Of course it was all only the usual sham about her not caring for Copleston. But she shammed splendidly ; and her outspoken readiness to do anything to get what she wanted meant the most entire union of souls. He began to guess what real love really means, her nature seemed so utterly in harmony with his own. Strange, indeed,

would it have been if Gideon Skull, at forty years old, had not fallen in love at very first sight with a handsome girl who was ready to go any lengths to get whatever she most wanted in the world. It is true that, as yet, her interpretation of ‘Everything and Anything’ was not quite the same as his own ; but then he fully believed, and thousands will agree with him, that where a man will go a mile for what he wants, a woman will go a league—unless her goal is ten leagues yet farther off, and then she will go the other ten.

‘I will tell you what I think of you : you are——’

‘I don’t want to know what anybody thinks of me. I want to know how Copleston is to be got back for Alan. I know what to think of myself ; people may think of me as they please.’

‘Miss Reid.’

‘Well?’

‘Will you—remembering what you have told me—let me go over the whole affair in my own mind, and try to give you an answer, say, in three days ?’

Helen's face fell. 'Need it take so long ? If there is fraud——'

'So long—for two people against the law ?'

'It cannot be the law that, when a man like my father dies without a will, his land goes to a distant cousin instead of his only son.'

'It cannot be justice—no. But when that son is in Alan's position, it most surely is the law. Surely you know that, Miss Reid.'

'In Alan's position ? I don't understand,' she said, turning pale with fear of the revelation of she knew not what mystery. 'I know Alan as I know myself. What can Alan have done that the law should rob him of his own ? Tell me, for God's sake, what you mean !'

'You mean to say you do not know—you have not been able to understand how the law does not look upon your brother as any man's son !'

'I know nothing—I understand nothing. I must and I will know.'

'Do you mean to tell me that nobody has explained to you——?'

‘Tell me instantly what you mean.’

It could not come into his head—though it might easily have come into that of a much less clever man—that Helen had been kept in ignorance of the cause of the loss of Copleston. He could only suppose that, as was natural enough, she had not been able, considering her age rather than her sex, to grasp the exact bearing of the laws of marriage when they stood on one side and justice and interest on the other. He had never yet found a woman capable of fully understanding a law that worked to her own injury, however great her genius might be for knowing by instinct the most intricate legal rules that bore in her favour. And probably, considering both her age and her sex, her mother and brother, being no doubt slaves to all the proprieties, had not been given to discuss such a matter before Helen. But he, being no slave to any absurd and hypocritical notions, was certainly not going to leave her in the dark about any matter that would tend to make her reliance upon him more absolute and thorough. ‘I will tell you,’ said he. ‘The law of England

does not—except, I believe, under some very peculiar circumstances with which we have no concern—recognise a second marriage while a first wife is living. It does not only forbid such a marriage: it treats it as an idle form, and as no more a marriage than if the parties to it had never even gone through the form. And, in the teeth of nature, it declares that without a marriage there can be no children. Now you see, Miss Reid, there is no question but that your father and mother thought they were free to marry. Perhaps your mother never even thought of a possible obstacle—but that you no doubt know better than I can suppose. Waldron is an unspeakable scoundrel, no doubt, to take advantage of an unintentional bigamy. But he knew his facts; and you know how completely your brother and your mother have considered that he proved them. So, you see, when your father died—without the will by which he might have left Copleston to me, if he had pleased—he could not be succeeded by his son, because, in law, he had no son. He was, as a matter of course, succeeded by Victor

Waldron, who was his heir-at-law, and blackguard enough to go to your brother and show that he was in a position to enforce his claim. Miss Reid—I declare to you that, when I warned your brother of the state of the case, I had no more idea of his surrendering without a fight, and a hard one, and perhaps a successful one, than I should have thought it of—of—you. I thought he would have brought forward unanswerable proof that—good God!—Miss Reid!—What is the matter—are you ill?’

‘Who says that my mother was not my father’s wife? You?’

His story had through all its after-part been turning into mere words that scarcely touched even her ears. She had scarcely heard since she was born of harm unfitting to lodge in a girl’s mind and memory; all life had been clean and pure to her every day and all day long. She had more than a girl’s ignorance of all things of which it used to be held right for a girl never even to hear the names. Alan’s care for her in this had only been the natural outcome of the whole air in

which she had grown. And now the shock of suddenly enlightened ignorance about such things—always more than repulsive enough—came upon her in the shape of the discovery that her dead father, and her own mother, and she, and Alan, were mixed together in a chaos of unlawful relationship ; that they were declared and branded outcasts, beyond the pale of human law. No wonder that Gideon Skull had thought her taken suddenly faint or ill.

But he did not think so for long. The spirit of shame had fallen upon Alan, and had crushed his pride ; but it was the spirit of rebellion that came to her, and raised hers. Victor Waldron, in Hillswick Churchyard, had seen her flashing out war against one man. Gideon Skull saw more—he saw her as she stood before him as if defying the world : for it was the whole unjust world that had now become her foe.

So, in the eyes of the world that had once looked so beautiful—yes, even these last months now looked scarcely worse than a cloudy day—the daughterhood and brother-

hood which had given her world its living soul were worse than dead things ; they were things that had never been. How could she look upon a world that had invented such a lie, and then bade her believe it true ? which had invented a sin, and then punished for it those who she knew had in their hearts and minds never sinned—even Alan, who had never even stumbled into the likeness of wrong-doing ? It was, indeed, a hideous lie. How could the world rob her of one thing that had been as true as if the law had not declared her to be fatherless and brotherless, and a distant, unknown foreign cousin to be of nearer kin and blood to her own father than his own son ? That she had been kept in the dark magnified all these things a hundredfold. What must it not all mean when Alan himself had left her to grope blindly and to feel untrusted rather than let her know what had really come to her ? She judged him by her far more thorough self—that was her way. Had he been afraid that the news would strike her dead, or madden her, or what was it that he had feared ? Why had

he not told her, in all gentleness, that they were brother and sister no more—except in such useless, idle things as fact, and truth, and love, and nature—instead of leaving her to hear it coarsely and cuttingly set out by this Gideon Skull? If he thought her too weak to bear such news from him, how ought she to bear it now? Did it not seem horrible enough to her that she bore it at all?

‘Did not I tell you it was the law that said so?’ said Gideon. ‘I am not the law.’

‘I thank you for telling me,’ said Helen. ‘I thank you for knowing me better than even my own brother knew me. It is right I should know at once that nothing can be done, and that Alan . . . Thank you for your kindness to him and to me. I suppose you have done more than go out of your way in taking any notice of such people as we are. . . . Yes, I see now why my mother wishes Alan to make a name of his own. . . . And why he . . . I will give him your message. I have nothing more to ask you. Good-bye. Won’t you shake hands? Or is that improper, and against the law?’

Gideon had not put out his hand to hers, for he was in no hurry to leave, and he was getting a little bewildered. One moment Helen seemed to be above all women simply in her thoroughness of what he called womanhood ; the next he was thrown back upon his first impression, that she must be different from them in kind. ‘What can she be driving at now?’ he thought, with an anxious frown. ‘Good-bye? She’s got nothing out of me yet; I haven’t let slip one hint about the will. One would think that a girl had never been born out of marriage before, or that it signified a straw, apart from one’s father dying without a will.’ But in the same breath of thought the light in her eyes and the curl of her parted lips blinded him to all else; he let her motives run off unhunted, and seized her hand in both his own.

‘There!’ he said, deeply and fiercely. ‘That’s how much *I* care. Didn’t I say there was nothing on earth I wouldn’t do for you?’ He kept her hand hard, and rejoiced in the ruin, grief, and shame which had dragged her down to him, even so near that he might

claim the right of a champion to feel the pulses of her fingers send thrills and stings through his veins. It was a hand after his own heart, soft and delicate, but nervous and firm, which one might press without crushing or feeling it melt into nothing.

For her, her hand might have been as free as her thoughts, for anything she knew. In truth, Gideon Skull was as far from her as he was fancying her near to him. She saw nothing in the eyes bent down upon her that, had she seen it, would have alarmed even her ignorance, and have made her feel that she must have fallen low indeed before she could have been thus looked upon. She withdrew her hand, suspecting no cause for being angry with an impulse of generous kindness in a man who might almost have been her father, for his years, and who had proved himself her brother's friend—less than kin and more than kind.

‘ You have told me everything now,’ she said, half sadly, half bitterly. ‘ There is nothing to be done, except to let me have a little while to myself before I see Alan again.’

Gideon felt he had advanced so much farther in half an hour than he could have hoped for from a month's hard marching that he was well content with the wisdom of risking no chance of loss until he also had taken time to think and plan. Nor did he wish to see either Alan or Mrs. Reid just then. He wished to carry away with him the fresh flavour of his new passion, as well as to shape out a method for making passion and principle—his principle—agree. He moved to leave her instantly, as if her least word were a command to him.

‘But something can be done—something *shall* be done. I asked you for three days. But everything shall be done, if it takes three years.’

And so, at last, Helen knew why Alan had let Copleston slip from his fingers without a word. What was left to be done for Alan now?

CHAPTER XIII.

Heracles.—All blue, with balls of light, what is't thy shoulders bear?

Atlas.—Thou deem'st—poor mortal dwarf—'tis good to have such care?

Know that these shoulders ache beneath the weight of air,
Aweary with the light thou breathest everywhere.

* * * * *

Thou fain wouldest grasp the stars: there, take them—to thy pain:

Lift up Orion's Sword, and hold on high the Wain:
Before the sun is red, thou'l pray them lost again.

Wis , for 'tis good to wish:—and best, to wish in vain.

WHILE exaggerating all the rest of her position in a manner that would indeed have amazed the common sense of Gideon Skull could he have read Helen's whole mind, her ignorance saved her from one suspicion that, could it have found its way to her, would have made all the rest of her shame as nothing. It never came into her heart to imagine that her father and her mother could have done wrong: if the world condemned them, it was the world that was in the wrong, and not

they. She was prepared to change all her beliefs and all her instincts in an instant if in this matter they chose to take the world's side. New light came over a hundred things which she had taken as the simplest matters of course until now. She thought she could understand why it was that her father and mother had never cared to mix with a world of which they no doubt comprehended the injustice, tyranny, and hypocrisy, and why she and Alan had been brought up apart from others—since it was others who made up the world. She knew how good they were, so that all who condemned them must needs be evil. Her whole nature blamed them in a very different way. They should not have taken refuge in a hermitage : they should have fought against the world, and conquered, and been ruined, not as helpless victims, but as martyrs. Alan and she should have been trained to strength, and to the wisdom which is the better part of innocence. Alan would not have taken the world's part against himself and those who were dearer to him than himself, and she would not stand, in her igno-

rance and her weakness, alone against the world.

But was she so weak, after all?

As thought, after its first shock, took conscious shape again, and as she went over again, all at once, all the words of this last half-hour, she felt that at least one strong man had not found her so. Knowledge is not vanity. A soldier is not vain because he finds his rifle straight and his sword true. If what she knew to be true were true, she was not utterly without arms; she had only omitted to learn how to use them. She would have been thankful, in the rebellion of her whole spirit against all mankind and against her own helplessness, if anybody had put nothing better than a pointed straw into her hand. She would have gone hard to work to find some use for the straw. It seemed as if Gideon had taught her that she was the owner of some weapon of which she could as yet but dimly guess the strength and the nature; but it must needs be of more worth than a straw, and she, at least, would not go to the law to ask it if she might use what nature had given her,

whatever it might be. She began, with no touch of vanity, to think of herself with new thoughts and to look upon herself with new eyes. Of course, being a woman, she took it for a matter of course that it is beauty, and nothing else, which gives a woman power over man ; so, with no more elation of heart than if she had been examining the attractions of Bertha Meyrick, she assumed that she must have more beauty than she had hitherto thought of thinking, and went deliberately to the fly-blown mirror over the fireplace to find out exactly where it lay. It was a wretched piece of self-consciousness that Gideon had taught her—it was as if looks like his could not light on a woman without staining her. But it was not Gideon who had taught her the desire to make the worst of herself if her worst could be the best for Alan. Nor could she have learned it from her father, who, if he could have seen her then with those spiritual eyes which are blind to faces and see nothing less real and substantial than souls, would have failed to recognise his own child. But, nevertheless,

her spirit could not be wholly her own, and—

‘Who has been here?’ asked Mrs. Reid, seeing nothing out of the common in a girl standing before a looking-glass, even though the girl was Helen—whom the glass might have told that her mother’s beauty must once have been very like her own, though probably much greater, and that the likeness had been growing these last months in more ways than one. ‘I [heard a voice just now, and I did not care to come down.]’

One natural impulse in Helen to say out, ‘Mother, I know everything now—why have you kept it from me? Could you think that *I* should blame *you*? ’ would at any rate have opened Mrs. Reid’s eyes to the fact that her suppression of the will for her son’s sake had delivered Copleston into the hands of an owner instead of the mere trustee whom she supposed the curate of Hillswick to have found for her. She certainly would not have earned Alan’s reverence and Helen’s wonder by taking seeming ruin quite so calmly. But the impulse did not come. Mothers and daughters must

not put off the first of such impulses for twenty years if they wish them to be possible ; it was their father to whom Alan and Helen had always gone with their hearts in their hands. They knew their mother's love for them, and guessed its depths, especially, to Helen's complete content with a second place in all things, for Alan ; but they could not give it back to her openly as they could their father's, which had been always in sight, and had been the chief part of the air of their lives. So she only said, with the sigh of one who has been making a long journey alone in dreamland, and is suddenly called upon to wake up to daily things, 'Yes, Gideon Skull has been here. He wanted to see Alan about his going to the siege.'

Mrs. Reid noticed the sigh ; but it was natural, when Helen had to speak about a first parting from Alan, and she had no reason to notice anything more. She also sighed. 'I wish Alan had never come across this man. I am more than sorry he has been here. He is not a good man.'

'I suppose he is no worse than other men,' said Helen. 'I suppose they are all much the

same. I suppose it is men who make up the world and the laws.'

'Helen! what do you mean? It is not brave of you to speak in that bitter way—it is not like you, and not like the courage you promised me. What men have you known, but Alan and your father, that you should judge them all together with a man like Gideon Skull? And what do you know of him, that you think him no worse than your father and Alan? What has he been saying to you? We have not given up all our friends in order to open our doors to Gideon Skull when he pleases to call. He would never have dared to call at Copleston.'

'I mean I suppose Alan must know all sorts of men.'

'There is not the least reason why he should accept favours from Gideon Skull. There is no reason why Gideon Skull should call here. He is a man of the very worst character, as I told you before you left Copleston.'

'And is that how he has come to be rich —his being of the worst character? Poor

Alan ! He will always be poor Alan, I'm afraid.'

'I won't have you talk nonsense, Helen. He has become rich, and he has a bad character. But he has become rich because he was obliged to work for his living. I don't want Alan to become rich, God knows. But there is one thing in which I do wish him to be like Gideon Skull.'

'Yes, mamma. You mean, you wish him to conquer the world.'

'I wish him to make the best and utmost of himself. If he learns that, I shall thank God for all our other loss, and so will he. I don't say that Gideon Skull's best is Alan's best—God forbid ; But——'

'Yes, mamma,' said Helen again. 'Yes, I do see what you mean. We must fight the world in its own way, or else submit to every sort of wrong, and admit that wrong is right by our own submission. I wish *I* were a man.'

'You are not yourself to-day, Helen. I don't know what *you* mean. But I do know that, if I can help it, we have seen the last of Gideon Skull.'

There was more sympathy between Helen and Gideon than even he could hope to gain by strength and patience in many years. If evil must be done that good may come, he had argued, I'll do it and welcome. As others don't like to see the dirt on their fingers, I don't mind seeing on mine whatever's there. And if such evil must be done, argued she, let me be the one to do it, since other hands must not be stained. What does a process signify, if the end be the same? Though it is true that, by a good end, he and she did not mean quite the same thing. She, too, had a best and utmost to make of herself; and Gideon Skull, who had been strong enough to conquer the world, had taught her to guess wherein it lay. The minute had gone by for telling her mother all she knew, even had the whole household history of the Reids made such a confidence possible under any conditions. She had formed no plan; but she felt it to be a first condition of any plan she might be able to form that her mother and her brother should be kept as completely in the dark from all knowledge of it as they tried to

keep her. Any plan of hers would be certain, whatever else it might be, to be one of which they would not approve.

In one word, she was the Helen Reid of that Easter eve in Hillswick Church no more.

Thanks to Mrs. Reid's thorough-going love for her son, which set character above happiness, and happiness above fortune, Victor Waldron was master of Copleston.

He had certainly done his best and utmost to get rid of it. But he found himself as unable to get rid of a fine estate and an exceptionally fine income as most men are to rid themselves of their burdens. Not long ago he would have felt that to be once more Waldron of Copleston was the fulfilment of an ambition so great as to be well-nigh no better than a dream. But what flavour could it have to him when he thought of how it had come to him? And what should he do with it now that it had come? It is barely possible to follow him through the labyrinthine knot of difficulties which Alan had so proudly refused to permit him to cut in two. For many days there was not one in

which his whole heart did not curse Gideon Skull, or Alan hardly less than Gideon. He had seen Helen before she had changed, and her eyes, angry with honest scorn, followed him. He had seen the look in them which he would have given fifty Coplestons not to see ; and it seemed to haunt him more and more. He had no thought of marrying anybody, but he had no settled intention of marrying nobody ; and it certainly seemed hard that he, at his age, should take a monk's vows so as to guard against the chance of having children to whom it would be unjust to allow Copleston to descend. Alan, or Alan's children, or Helen, or her children, must be his heirs ; and, for that purpose, he must allow Copleston to cut him off from the commonest right of being happy. The treason of selling the place never entered his mind, so that Copleston, his family Mecca, dearer and more sacred to his romance than it could in that way be to any mere substantial possessor, should fall to some accidental stranger without one drop of Waldron blood in his veins. Why, thought the Republican from America, it might go to some shop-

keeper who might even be an alderman. Once a day at least he used to feel amused at his own hardly comprehensible perplexity in groaning under the weight of acres which most people would have carried as lightly as a feather ; it seemed ridiculous even to him that a sane man should quarrel with wealth and position which had come to him lawfully, and, so far as his intentions and wishes had been concerned, not unfairly. But such moods did not last. Copleston would insist upon looking at him with the eyes wherewith Helen Reid had declared war to the knife against him. In short, he was more troubled in spirit over these English acres than two great nations were over Alsace and Lorraine.

He certainly did not house his bachelorhood in the large empty mansion which he had hardly had the heart to go and see. When he had come over from America with his fancied right, he had amused himself with the vision of taking a leading place in the country, and showing his neighbours what an enlightened and civilised American thought of the rights and duties of a squire—how romance and pro-

gress might blend into one harmonious whole. But, if this was the mission for which Providence had forced Copleston upon him, there would be ample time, and to spare, for that when he could make up his mind that there was no escape from it, and that he must needs submit with resignation to being a rich country gentleman instead of a man about the world with only his own wits for capital. It would be time enough then, in his capacity of American justice of the peace for an English county, to teach his brethren of the quorum truth and common sense about the game laws, and thus become so popular and so much thought of that—qualified by the British birth of his grandfather—he might carry his notions into Parliament itself, and show Lords and Commons what statesmanship, as understood by the most advanced and civilised of nations, really means. But meanwhile, though very far from shy, he did not care, as a mere matter of duty, to face all these rights and duties among strangers. He left Hillswick, and went to Deepweald, the county town. There, like a sensible man of business, he put Copleston

and its affairs into the hands of Mr. Swann, the leading estate agent there, who acted as steward for some of the largest estates in the county ; and from Deepweald he went back to London, where Copleston, however it might interfere with his life, need not interfere with his days more than he pleased. Mr. Swann had found his new client merely an excellent business man ; the Hillswick people found plenty of food for talk, but none for wonder, in the fact that a Yankee squire should feel himself too little at home to care to stay there. No doubt he did not feel up to mixing with the county people, who would certainly object to associating on equal terms with a man whom his native air compelled to chew tobacco in an unpleasant way, to shoot guests who refused a cocktail, and to stretch out his legs upon instead of under the table. Nobody had seen him do anything of the sort at the ‘George,’ but then, as all the world knows, want of experience counts for nothing when opposed by notoriously universal theory. And no doubt he would in due time bring home a Yankee wife to Copleston—and then, indeed, it would

be time to talk, and all Hillswick would see what it would see.

He was intensely in earnest in all he thought and felt about Copleston ; certainly not the less because it was with Helen's eyes that this perverse estate insisted on facing him. But, nevertheless, a weight seemed to drop from him at the end of every mile between Deepweald and town. One cannot be for ever worrying oneself about the inevitable, still less about matters which do not admit of immediate action or even decision. Inaction and indecision were both alike hateful to Victor Waldron, so he dwelt upon their necessity as little as possible. He was not so uselessly and childishly proud as to refuse to touch the rents that he received through his steward and agent at Deepweald ; indeed, how he could refuse to take his own without setting about any quantity of talk and scandal, and without being in the end shut up as a madman, is hard to say. It was certainly not the receipt of the annual income of Copleston that troubled him, so long as he did nothing to damage the estate from which the income came ; and, for that

matter, the estate itself needed outlays from time to time which he could not have met otherwise. So, for the present, he made a sort of settlement in London, without any fixed plan of staying there or anywhere ; living easily and quietly at a large hotel where the guests were mainly of his own country, drifting into a sort of general acquaintance among whom he never spoke of Copleston or of his stake in the mother country, professing to study English political and social institutions, amusing himself for occupation, according to his tastes and opportunities, and writing a book for pastime. He felt tempted now and then to enter into business, not being of the stuff of which idlers are made ; but he could not make trade square in his mind with his ideal of a Waldron of Copleston. It is a wonder that he did not fall in love with somebody, just for the sake of having something to do that would really absorb him without doing anything that might misbecome one who bore such a name.

It was September, so that the season was not favourable for the collection of materials

at first hand for his book on English Society ; but it gave him the much greater advantage of hearing the opinions and experiences of an army of his travelling fellow-countrymen who had enjoyed greater and more frequent opportunities for observation than he. For the first time in history, a squire of Copleston was in town when the fields were in stubble. The birds must have thought it the beginning of their millennium. This kind of life was all very well for a time, so long as he required nothing more than an escape from Copleston into the liberty of London, and an opportunity for not thinking about anything when everything was so disagreeable ; but presently he began to feel infinitely bored and to be angry with himself for his indecision.

‘ If I don’t settle my life somehow,’ he thought to himself one day as he went out after a whole hour’s literary labour, ‘ I shall forget how to feel that I have more legs than an oyster. I believe the best thing I could do, after all, would be to forge a will for old Harry Reid and hide it away in Copleston where it would be certain to be found. But I

suppose even then something would happen—I should forget to dot an *i*, or to flourish a *d*, and then I should still be Waldron of Copleston and a felon into the bargain. I wonder if it would be criminal to commit forgery in order to deprive oneself of one's own inheritance ; the thing would be worth doing if only to clear up the point of law. . . . What ! Why, Sims ? What are *you* doing this side of things ?'

'Waldron ? Glad to see you, sir,' said the sub-editor of the 'Argus,' holding out his hand. 'I hope you are well.'

'You know all about everything, Sims, don't you ?'

'Reckon an editor's got to know most things,' said Mr. Sims, 'but don't follow he tells. What do you want to know ?'

'I want to know what they'd do to a man in this country who forged a document that would leave him without a cent in the world ?'

'Give that up,' said Mr. Sims.

'No—it's not a conundrum. I want to know.'

‘What they’d do to a man who committed forgery against himself? This is in many ways a very remarkable country, Mr. Waldron.’

‘That’s my thunder—don’t quote my book before it’s written over. Well? I want to know.’

‘It is in many ways a very remarkable country. But I have observed that there is considerable unanimity among mankind where human nature comes in. And by human nature I don’t mean British nature, or French nature, or Prussian nature, or American nature, but the nature of men. And this is a question of human nature. Therefore I conclude, Mr. Waldron, that a man who forged such a document as you mention would be dealt with in Great Britain just as he would be treated at home.’

‘And how would they treat him at home—say in Spraggville?’

‘They would confine him in the state asylum. And they would not let him out again while he had a cent left to forge away.’

‘Yes; I suppose a man is a lunatic who doesn’t take all he can get, and stick to it as

tight as he can. What are you doing over here? Work or play ?'

' I am assisting Mr. Crowder to carry on this war. I wish I had met you sooner ; I could have offered you the post of special correspondent for the " Argus " at Versayl.'

' And on my honour, Sims, I wish it too ; for if you had, I believe I should have taken it and gone. Do you know how it feels to want to shoot somebody—anybody—just for the sake of doing something real, and to have something to think about for the rest of one's days ? '

Mr. Sims looked at him a little nervously. Such talk of unprofitable forgery and general murder made him feel as if his allusion to madhouses might be a better-fitting cap than he had supposed. ' No,' said he meditatively, ' I do not call to mind having felt that. Nor is it the duty of a war correspondent to be shot, if he can help it, nor to shoot at all.'

' Well, I *would* have gone. And I'd have raised the hair on the heads of all Spraggville with the letters I'd have written them. Is it too late ? Have you got a better man ? '

‘No, sir ; we have not got a better man. I am disappointed in Crowder. Crowder has his good qualities, but he is weak, Mr. Waldron. He is not strong. I find no fault with Crowder. But I do say that when a man in the position of Eurōpian editor of a great journal throws all the work on other shoulders for the sake of putting his legs under the same table with a lord, and chooses a man for the responsible post of war correspondent because that man happens to be a lord’s friend—I do say that is weak in Crowder, and not what the representative of a great paper engaged in carrying on a great war ought to do. I do not ask for your opinion on the subject, Mr. Waldron, because I happen to know that it can’t help being the same as my own. What’s the good of having no lords of our own, if we go and ko-tow them whenever we’re abroad ? It is a feature in our national character which I do not admire.’

‘I don’t know,’ said Victor with a smile, wondering whether it was altogether a spirit of national independence, entirely unadulterated with jealousy, that made a Sims so

severe upon the foibles of a Crowder. ‘I wouldn’t mind, myself, going out of my way to dine with a duke, if he was a good fellow. A man can’t help his inheritance sometimes, and it’s hard to visit the sins of the fathers on the children, though I know it’s the way. I’ve enough of the old Tory in me to have a good deal of sympathy with Crowder, though of course you’re right on principle. I wish I’d been born in Spraggville; I should always know then what to think about everything. Come and dine with me. I can’t promise you a duke, but——’

‘It isn’t a duke,’ said Mr. Sims. ‘Crowder won’t like it when I tell him to-morrow that I’ve made inquiries, and that his lord’s only a lord in Ireland, and doesn’t belong to the House of Peers. I should like to dine with you, but Crowder’s made that impossible. Reckon, though, he’ll be sorry when he finds he’s been out of the way, and that they know it in Spraggville, when the biggest thing in the whole war comes in.’

‘What’s that? I’ve heard no news to-day.’

‘The “Spraggville Argus” must not suffer by the temporary want of a correspondent, Mr. Waldron. It must not depend upon the leg of a Scotchman. The news *must* come in. And they shall know in Spraggville that the biggest thing in the whole siege came in while Crowder was licking the boots of a lord.’

‘I feel as if I’d dropped right off the face of the world,’ thought Victor, when he had parted from Sims. ‘Instead of being in the thick of things, I’m amusing myself by looking on at others. That’s not a wholesome feeling. I shall end by thinking that people are all fools except ten, and that the ten are all knaves except one, and that the one’s a Victor Waldron—a sort of mongrel, who doesn’t want to keep his own because he’s afraid of being thought a knave, and yet can’t throw it away because he’s afraid of being thought a fool. I wish that girl could know how much good Copleston’s doing me. I wish I hadn’t met her in that confounded old belfry. Things would have been an ounce or two easier. Even if old Harry Reid had died all the same, I could have called at Copleston.

And who knows? But that's too great rubbish to think of; that way lies sheer idiocy. As for mooning round in London, I'm as likely to see her as if I went to Astrakhan; and if I did, she'd either cut me dead with a toss of her chin and a sweep of her gown, or else she'd give me the other half of her mind. I wish I was Sims, or Crowder. They're both happy men. I must do something or other, if it's only for the sake of snapping my fingers in my own face and letting Victor Waldron of Copleston see what account I make of him and his sickly notions. I'll leave London, and go and study the social and political institutions of Nova Zembla. Perhaps Miss Helen Reid might be passing that way, and get wrecked on the coast, and I might save her life—or her brother's—and then she'd have to be polite enough to hear what I'd got to say; and her tongue might run out, and give me time to get a word in before the end of an Arctic winter. Anyhow, it's a more likely way than mooning round here. I'll go and—dine.'

He turned into his nearest dining haunt,

and, in spite of his troubles, dined well. But there was still a long evening to be spent, and the approach of the equinox was sending so many of his acquaintances homewards that he chanced to find himself for once altogether on his own hands. Though sociable by nature, he had made no intimate comrade since his quarrel with Gideon ; his life felt no need of any companionship save such as he was not likely to find, and not even of that consciously. There are times when one's soil prefers to lie fallow rather than bear any crop except one, and may mistake for natural barrenness its want of even so much as a crop of weeds. In the hope of curing like by like, he bored himself at a theatre, and then went to complete the process by turning into one of those clubs which sprout up in Bohemia like mushrooms, and are to the palaces of Pall Mall what the half-world is to the whole one.

He had become free of many such, for Bohemia is a hospitable country, and, while it feasts the poor, it never forgets the rich—for, even there, somebody must pay. This was a society which called itself the Bats ; and it

opened its arms freely to everybody who could lay the least claim to any connection with art or literature by going to bed when the sun set—on the other side of the world. Not many of the Bats were as yet known to public fame, but every one of them was going to be in the course of a week or so, and meanwhile they discounted glory for one another on liberal terms.

It was early for the Bats, for Victor had left the theatre early and had gone straight there, while there was seldom much of a gathering till after twelve. In the dingy room at the top of the house, within three doors of where the Reids were living, Victor seated himself among the few Bats who were there, some breakfasting and all smoking hard, without the power of guessing that the girl who ran, like a persistent and obtrusive discord, through all his thoughts, and whom he thought a voyage to Nova Zembla the most likely way to find, was within fifty yards of his chair. It was certainly no occult result of spiritual magnetism which had made his thoughts run so much to-day upon Helen;

for yesterday also, when he had not been near her, she had been more in his mind than the day before. But to think how we in London meet and do not meet, how miles may mean yards, and how inches may mean hundreds of miles ; how all reason is defied by the crossing of parallels and the divergence of straight lines from their own directions ; how the accident of a minute, or the existence of a wall of lath and plaster, makes and ruins lives—all this is a commonplace well-nigh too awful to face and to dwell upon.

The talk of the Bats was not brilliant at present ; they were mostly men who required time for waking, and nobody who chanced to have anything new to say cared to waste it upon a small and early company. The few who were present talked about the war, the weather, and their absent friends so much like commonplace people that an outsider would have been puzzled to guess in what lay those special sympathies which brought them together out of the vulgar world. But presently men began to drop in by ones, twos, and threes : and by about one o'clock the

room was tolerably full, and the talk a great deal more free.

Victor was taking his full share in the talk of the men just round him, some of them Bats and some of them Bats' friends, when the door swung open, and he saw through the smoke cloud an entrance, which, if he could have foreseen it, would have made him avoid the Bats for that evening. It was a party of four —a member and three friends. The Bat was Lord Ovoca, an Irish earl with whom he had some club acquaintance; a good-looking, good-natured young man, who lived in some sort of fashion upon his own and his ancestors' debts, betted when he was certain of winning, had a large stock of highly-flavoured anecdotes which his brogue made amusing, and had otherwise qualified himself for the Bats by having written a comic song and by hanging about stage doors. It is always considered a graceful thing when a nobleman prefers the society of artists and men of letters to any other. With his arm through this young nobleman's, and with his chin high in the air, entered a figure which a stranger might easily

have taken for that of Mr. Sims, but which Victor, who knew Spraggville, recognised as Mr. Crowder's, to whom Lord Ovoca's arm was not merely a source of pride, but of use as a support: for Mr. Crowder, as he came in, most unmistakably lurched against the door. Behind these was a young man whom Waldron did not know. But behind him again was Gideon Skull.

However, there was no reason why the two former friends should interfere with one another on this neutral ground. They glanced at one another for a moment, and then looked away again as if they were strangers—Victor unable to help a slight flush, Gideon with no expression at all. But Mr. Crowder intercepted Victor's glance on its return, nodded with a look of wooden wisdom, steadied himself, and led Lord Ovoca to him across the room.

'How do you do, sir?' he said. 'I hope you are well. Good fellows ought to know one another. Allow me to introduce to you my old friend the Right Honourable the Earl of Ovoca. We have been dining at the Universal. Allow me to introduce to your Lordship my old friend Mr.—'

‘We’re fellow Bats, Crowder,’ said Lord Ovoca. ‘I know’m, and he knows me. What’ll ye drink now? Oh, but ye must,’ and he rang for the waiter. ‘I take brandy myself—’ and, forgetting that Waldron was writing a book which, by its scheme, included the manners and customs of British Earls as well as of lesser men, winked most significantly to the author behind the back of the editor. It was not every day that Lord Ovoca had a teetotaller to play with, but he clearly understood the spirit of the game. ‘There, Crowder, ye may drink that brandy for a week, and ye’ll be as sober on Saturday as ye were on Sunday. I think,’ he said to Waldron, ‘that ye know Skull? Ye should have been with us to-day—they gave us a bisque that would have turned old Bismarck into a Frenchman.’

Victor and Gideon made a pretence of bowing, and then Gideon turned his back and marched off to the farthest end of the room. Victor had already shown he had no shame; Gideon would have felt mean-spirited if he had for one needless moment put up with

the company of such a knave. Nor did he like him the better for having known Helen before him. But then it was true that she had only known him to hate him—and no wonder.

‘This gentleman,’ said Mr. Crowder, as he took a good gulp of the brandy-and-water that Lord Ovoca had mixed for him—‘This gentleman is going to represent the “Argus” at Versayl. It is a great responsibility to represent the “Argus” at Versayl. He’s going to start for the “Argus” in twelve hours. Allow me to introduce you two gentlemen. Mr. Wal—Waldor, Mr. Allen—Mr. Allen, Mr. Wa——. Good fellows ought to know one another. We’re all good fellows. We’ll all know one another all round.’ He took another gulp, and grinned.

‘So you are going out for the “Argus”? ’ said Victor. ‘By Jove, I envy you.’

‘We’ll all go out for the “Argus,”’ said Mr. Crowder. ‘Everybody here.’

Victor let the talk, such as it was, go on while he smoked and conversed with the ceiling. He must do something—anything; what

better thing could he do, in war time, while history was making itself at white heat, than make himself a part of it, however small? What was London to him, after all, or he to London? He had found nothing there that he wanted, and never would; and as to putting a few miles more between himself and Copleston, he would gladly have put a thousand. Would any one of his ancestors, down to his grandfather the rebel general, have stayed at home while the trumpets were sounding and the swords clashing and the guns firing less than two short hundred miles away? He looked at the supposed Mr. Allen and took stock of him; he liked his face, with its frankness tempered by a certain grave modesty, and thought, ‘I suppose this young fellow would change places with me any day. I wonder if Sims would think me still more of a lunatic if I were to offer him Copleston and its thousands a year to take his place at Versailles. . . . Well, one can find better work at a siege than writing letters to Spraggville. . . . So you are starting for Versailles in twelve hours?’

‘Those are my orders,’ said Alan.

‘And, by a curious coincidence,’ said Victor, still looking at the ceiling, ‘so am I. I’m going to Versailles too.’

‘Indeed! Also for a paper?’

‘No. I’m not going for a paper. I’m going, like Harry Smith, for my own hand. I’ve seen something of fighting on our side the water, and I’ve got a fancy for seeing how they do it on yours. Let’s start together. I do not know when I get out what I shall do, but if you do not know Spraggville, I can put you up to a thing or two till we part company. Yes—I mean it. In twelve hours we’ll be off to Versailles.’

His national restlessness had found a vent at last, in which to think might mean to decide, and to decide would mean to do. Alan looked at Victor in his turn, and he said:

‘By all means. I shall be only too glad of your company. Where shall we meet, and how? I start from Charing Cross at twelve. I suppose you’ve made all your plans?’

‘All I need. I hate plans. I like taking what comes. I’ve got to write a letter or two,

and I'll meet you at the dépôt. Look out for me, and I'll look out for you.'

There was nothing to surprise anybody in Waldron's resolve, which might, for anything anybody knew, have been made weeks before. Plenty of people went to the siege for no better reason. He stayed at the Bats, talking, till Alan had said good-night, shaken hands with Gideon, and had hurried off home to make the best of the few hours left him to prepare, and to spend all the time he could with Helen and his mother. Waldron left Lord Ovoca, Mr. Crowder, and Gideon Skull at the Bats, and went back to his hotel, where, in truth, he had nothing to do but write to Mr. Swann at Deepweald, pack a valise, and pay his bill.

'Well, we're fairly off now,' said Victor when their train was on its way, 'and we needn't be in a hurry about anything for a couple of hours. We may as well know one another as well as we can. Did I understand Crowder to say your name is Allen?'

'Crowder mixed other things besides his drinks,' said Alan with a smile. 'My name is Alan Reid.'

‘ Alan Reid ! ’

‘ Why not ? ’

‘ Reid—of Copleston ? ’ asked Victor, so eagerly that Alan stared at him.

‘ I once lived at Copleston,’ said he, with a frown. ‘ What do you know of Copleston ? ’

‘ I’ve been about in your country, and I’ve heard of that family. I thought you might be one of them. That’s all. We Americans are famous for asking questions, you know. Think yourself lucky I didn’t ask you right off how old you are, and what you’ve got a year.’

‘ I didn’t quite catch your name either,’ said Alan.

Victor thought for an instant: but no pause was perceptible. ‘ My name ? Oh, Gray,’ said he.

‘ I fancied Crowder called you Walters, or some such name.’

‘ Crowder was drunk. He was calling everybody by his first name. He called you Alan, and you’re Alan Reid; he called me Walter, and I’m Walter Gray. I dare say he ended by calling Lord Ovoca, Bill. And now, as we know how we’re called, let’s start fair, and shake hands,’ said Victor.

CHAPTER XIV.

Traveller. Show me my path, fair star : to right ? to left ?

Ignis Fatuus. To left.

Traveller. Whereunto shall I reach this road to-night ?

Ignis Fatuus. To Night.

Traveller. I seek no night, good star : I seek a rest.

Ignis Fatuus. Arrest !

Traveller. Nay, but not here ?—which turn doth point a way ?

Ignis Fatuus. Away !

Traveller. Thou'rt Echo's Sister. Lead where go I will.

Ignis Fatuus. I will.

Traveller. Now hath she answered me—I'll trust this Elf—

Ignis Fatuus. Thyself.

ALAN had seen nothing new in his sister before he set off for Versailles. He had no reason to look for anything, and was much too full of hurry, and of a long-forgotten glow of what —had he thought about them—he must, in the face of hopeless love, have been compelled to call high spirits, to set down Helen's manner to anything but sympathy with his own excitement, tempered by whatever sadness his sudden departure might bring upon her during

the hour of good-bye. Men cannot love without living ; and there are not many—happily for something a great deal better than romance—who can keep themselves up to broken-hearted point every day and all day long. At any rate, Alan Reid was not a lover of that kind, and the prospect of an escape from the stagnant pond in which he had been living all these months into the stormiest of seas was more than enough, at the first burst, to thrust even Bertha a good way back into a rather dark corner of the heart of a healthy-bodied man. After all, a thing is not thrust out by being pushed farther in.

But Helen, reading his clear nature by her own clouded twilight, saw in his perfectly frank and natural pleasure at finding himself alive again only the recklessness of despair, driving her brother to any sort of false excitement—sending him to the whirl of war as a substitute for the bottle, the dice-box, or for any like lunacies which their meanness closed to him. Of course she did not even by a look, so far as she could control her looks, give him the least hint of the new knowledge she had

learned from Gideon Skull. That had come to divide them, not indeed in heart, but in soul. Their ways and their thoughts could be the same no more.

To her mother she was just as silent, while any change in her, coming with Alan's departure, seemed just as natural. Indeed, Mrs. Reid, like her son, had a good deal more to think about than Helen's looks and words, which could matter nothing. Thus far, the course of her plan had proved a disappointment to her. But even the nature of her disappointment only proved to her more clearly how very right she had been. Alan, to her anxious and impatient eyes, had displayed all the faults and weaknesses that she had feared; only they seemed more ingrained and developed than she had feared. Knowing nothing of what he had lost or of what he believed, she could only wonder, with an aching heart, at the unlooked-for manner in which a seemingly healthy-minded and strong-bodied young man, a gentleman, too, and with her own blood in him, had taken the mere loss of a fortune. He had been patient: and she had looked for

the eager spirit of the soldier who hears the sound of the trumpet sounding the charge. He had plodded and tramped about London in search of daily bread, when she had looked for the birth of the spirit which knows of no choice but that between death and victory. He had been proud and sensitive, instead of covering himself with steel ; passively kind and tender when he should have been wilful and strong. And now, instead of making some far-reaching plan to lead him to some great goal, he had thankfully picked up the first bone with a scrap or two of meat for the day upon it which had been thrown him by a stranger as a useless thing. No, thought she, he is not like his father, after all. His father would have done all things, if he had had them to do. It looks as if he had left nothing to his son but his one weak side. And so, rendered doubly obstinate by disappointment, she hardened herself in her scheme—certainly none the less because of a secret doubt that it was an error from the beginning. How could she go to him and say, ‘ You have proved to me that you deserve nothing—so take the

fortune that you do not deserve, and could never have made'? It would be insulting her own son, who had all her living love and his dead father in him. He had the one virtue of pride, and that would make him refuse to take what only her half-scornful pity tossed back to him. Perhaps he would only feel that she had been wronging him, and playing with him as if he had been a child. Only the success of her scheme could make him understand her and thank her ; and if he failed to understand her—better than such an end as that would be loss and poverty to the very end.

In short, if her plan for Alan did not win by itself, it must be made to win. She was most assuredly not playing to lose. If dice happen to be so made that nothing but the double ace turns up however they are thrown, the weight must be shifted to the other side if one means to win. What error had she committed? Absolutely none that she could see. While Alan was on his way to Versailles, and Helen was thinking her own thoughts, their mother sat reviewing from the beginning a situation of which nobody could dream but

the curate of Hillswick, and he only as a phase of thought which mental humility, a natural lowliness and reverence of self-ordering to all his betters, and the hope of a living, might make him accept, but could not help him to understand. She could find no error. There had been no difficulty even. She had looked for many, and had found none. Without any sort of legal fuss or form her co-executor had found her a steward and trustee for Copleston, willing to act as owner : for Waldron's entry upon the estate meant nothing more to her. The curate himself could not undeceive her, even had he been willing ; for that very same good office of finding the ostensible owner and secret trustee which she believed he had done for her, he believed that his nephew Gideon had done for him. Without Gideon's help he could not have done it at all ; while he was the last man on earth to lessen his importance in Mrs. Reid's eyes by admitting the most unavoidable breach of confidence to a necessary deputy ; and Gideon was no less the last man, when he saw a misunderstanding going, to cut off any possibility of using it by clearing it away prema-

turely. So, reviewing all she could possibly know, Copleston, without any trouble, was as secure as if it had been in Alan's own hands. The will, too, was as safe as Copleston, in a box in the strong-room of the bank at Hillswick, where no one would dream of looking for what nobody thought existed, and where no accident could bring it to light until she pleased. Not that she intended any accident, even in seeming, to bring it to light even when the time came. Alan, she felt, would blame her now if by any impossible chance he should discover the method she had chosen for his education. But when the time came, whether at the end of seven years or later, the chest would be given up to him without any mystery, and she would say to him with pride in him and for him, ‘See what I have done for you and borne for you !’ and he would thank her, not for giving him a fortune, but for having made him a man. Surely, after all, her disappointment was all too soon. It came from over-impatience, perhaps—nothing more. What were a few months to make a beginning in, out of seven years ? No doubt his beginning had

been a bad one. All the more need to stand by a plan which was made out to ensure a good end. Providence itself must be vexed and puzzled now and then at the immediate effect of its own plans. All the more reason for not changing them. A cloudy morning is the surest sign of a clear noon.

So once more the poor lady let her warm Welsh heart and her sharp Welsh wits twist themselves into a web from which a colder nature and a blunter mind would surely have saved her. A stranger to the world from her cradle, born and bred among out-of-the-way mountains, matured and completed in the self-sufficing circle of four at Copleston, her husband and her son had been her universe, which she had studied with far more love and zeal than knowledge. She had learned only the romance of the world's battle, and it had fired her mind with barren ambition for them. She had come to Copleston as a stranger, and a stranger she had lived in it all her days, looking at life, both within and without the park palings, very differently from those who really felt it to be their home. She could

not make them understand what she saw and knew, in spite of all her wit and all her will. When all she read and heard, even down to the Reverend Christopher Skull's Sunday sermons, told her that life was so great and death so awful, how sane men could content themselves with catching fish, or peddling over parish or even county matters, or breeding foxes to be worried by dogs, she had never been able to comprehend. The common lot of women she accepted, for she had never heard of the new school; whatever was, was right, as a matter of course, for Helen and her. But it was like a burden on her own conscience that one whom love, as a matter of course, accepted as made by nature for a great poet or a great statesman—perhaps the greatest of his age and country—should act, or rather rust, as if life were nothing to him; as if the common accident of having a few thousands a year had set him outside the largest issues and above the highest and worthiest ambitions. She felt the full weight of Copleston when, after a few efforts to strike fire out of old Harry, she had to own that, not even to please her, could he

become anything but what nature—or, as she put it, as Copleston—had made him. He would have gone to the block for her sake, she knew, and she was proud of the knowledge : but she wanted him to go to a throne—and to that wish he seemed simply deaf and blind, and as happy and content in ignoring it, and as much taking her share in his own content and happiness for granted, as if they had only one soul between them, and that his own. No wonder that, when he died, the common household happiness with which he had filled her life oppressed her like a sense of sin. Into what might not his ten talents have grown if she herself had not fallen short in strength of purpose and will ? What sort of wife is she who does not supply all that is wanting in her husband to make the best and utmost of him ? What else should marriage mean ? Well—motherhood might mean that too, and more. Alan had none of his father's genius—as she termed the little tastes and turns that had blossomed so brightly at Copleston and round Hillswick ; that is to say, where there were neither critics nor rivals. But it is better to

use one talent than bury ten—and where would her conscience be if Alan's one went to swell the hoard that had been buried in Copleston?

Much of all this she had already put into words, when she was unwillingly obliged to take into her confidence the man who had the temporary cure of her soul, and who, under her husband's will, shared her temporal responsibilities. But the better half had been left unspoken, even to herself; impulse and instinct, in this quiet, slow-moving woman, were at the root of it all, and these are without language. They have to go to reason for words; reason finds words of a sort fast enough, but never quite the right ones, and, more often than not, exactly the wrong. Her text to-day was a small packet of bank-notes which Alan had bargained to receive beforehand from the 'Argus', so that he might feel at ease about his mother and sister. They were to receive for him all except what he was to be paid for his expenses, and, thanks to the atmosphere of Gideon's dinner, with its lord and its champagne, the payment in advance had been more

generous than it might have been had Alan's engagement been made in cold blood in the Fleet Street office, and with Mr. Sims to watch the proceedings. Mrs. Reid looked down upon their source—a newspaper, and not even an English one—but her fingers could not feel quite unmoved at the touch of the first gold that Alan had earned. As she felt now, even a reporter's wages were more honourable, and promised more, than the whole income of Copleston. If it had only been a barrister's or a physician's first fee! It would have justified her whole plan for him, instead of only encouraging her to go on to the end, to put doubt and impatience once for all under lock and key, hide them with the will, and never look at them again. Without the notes she and Helen had enough for immediate needs; and she had taken care to provide for a long day of waiting better than she had let her children suppose. She put the notes into her desk, locked them up, and all misgivings with them. ‘We will pay them back in less than seven years, please God,’ said she.

But meanwhile somebody else was putting

his thoughts in order—and this was Gideon Skull.

When he parted from Helen, it must be owned that his mind had been, for him, strangely confused. He knew his new purpose, and had justified it to reason and sanity by making worldly wisdom approve of a seemingly irrational passion. He also knew that he was on some sort of road towards it ; but he was in a new and strange country, and he suspected that, even if he were on the best and straightest road, he might come to a dozen unexpected and bewildering turnings before he had advanced a mile. Love is by no means a simple matter when it comes, for the first time, to a man of forty. Gideon was quite sure that he would not take Helen—at least for a wife—without either Copleston itself as a dowry or with some near approach to its money value. He was certain of this, because he was quite sure that he was not insane. On the other hand, he could not bring himself to feel, as a sane man ought, that he would take two Coplestons as the price of giving up Helen; not even if by taking them and leaving her he

could inflict a just and righteous vengeance upon Victor Waldron. He thought, as he went about his immediate financial business, of her lips, her voice, her waist, the light in her eyes, and the blood in her cheeks, and the thrill in her fingers, in a way which women who like to catch what they call love at first sight from men with plenty of body about them must, we are bound to suppose, find flattering to them and pleasant to imagine. Perhaps if Helen had not gathered all her notions of love at first sight from story-books, which deal with it as if it were an ethereal film of most delicate spiritual subtlety most unlikely to catch its usual victims, she would have been less elated by the discovery that, in a reckless and desperate mood, she had some power over mankind as represented by Gideon Skull. But not even his particular way of thinking about Helen, engrossing as it was, nor the farther-reaching but equally engrossing thought of how he could make its satisfaction profitable to himself at the expense of Victor Waldron, made him inattentive to the demands of the hour. Instead of mooning about and trying to turn

his feelings into rhyme as well as reason, as a weaker-minded lover might have done, he went straight to the office of Messrs. Aristides and Sinon, where he had met Alan Reid.

Mr. Sinon, who had returned from Birmingham, received Gideon in a comfortable and not very business-like little office where the immediate affair on hand was a bottle of sherry and a pâté de Strasbourg. The merchant might have been a Jew, and was often thought so by those who knew no better. But he was very far indeed from being a Jew. The most typical and conventional of Jews would soon have found himself the most innocent of babies in the hands of a Gentile like Mr. Sinon —for it is a profound mistake to suppose that the Jews, who are supreme in Music and in all the pleasure-giving arts, crafts, and trades, and are better in spending than in getting, stand anywhere near first in business or in really important things. Why are there no Jews in Scotland? Why are they so shy of returning to the Promised Land? Why do they become mere nobodies where Greeks and Armenians flourish and do well? Mr.

Sinon was a pure-blooded Gentile and a most orthodox Christian of historic descent, in spite of his nose and his eyes. The Sinons are a very old Greek family, as every schoolboy used to know ; and are at any rate well known in Smyrna.

No greater contrast in looks can be than that between Mr. Sinon and his friend—in a strictly business sense—Gideon Skull ; or in manner either. And yet one can be greater—that between the two men as they looked and the two men as they were. Gideon looked the typical Englishman—bluff, close, silent, heavy, slow, with the honesty which is born of stupidity. Mr. Simon, besides being hook-nosed, sallow-faced, and sharp-eyed, was small, restless, and so given to brag and to chatter that even the cunning were taken in, and set him down as a conceited fool, or, at best or worst, as a very harmless sort of knave. In short, Gideon's stupidity and Mr. Sinon's folly were very much on a par, and neither had any cause to be ashamed of his ally or very much reason to be afraid of him. For that matter, Gideon Skull was afraid of nobody.

He made no remark on entering: his ‘Good-day’ was to pour himself out a glass of wine, over which he sat ruminating.

‘ You have the melancholy air ! ’ said Mr. Sinon gaily. He spoke English with a perfect accent, but occasionally used eccentric idioms when he was in a good humour and in sympathy with Paris—as she had been. ‘ Ah, if you were me—if your head was being gnawed by all the rats—I am one fool, Mr. Skull. Would you believe? I come late from Birmingham: I tire: I must amuse myself in whatever way. I go to the Juliette. I meet of jolidogs *chez elle*—eight, nine, ten. We drink all the champagne. We play the grand treize. I lose—I win—I lose. I lose my head; I win the ache for him. I take the hairs of the dog—one dozen, two, three. No question, in the cup I tell everything. I —— ’

‘ Whatever you told, it was the right thing to the right man, in your cups or out of it,’ said Gideon. ‘ The question is, what you did in Birmingham ? ’ He could not help the slightest possible sneer at the idea of the

vulture-faced, sallow little man—looking like a cross between a usurer and a conspirator—making a night of it in such a fashion, and having nothing but a headache to show for it in the morning.

‘In Birmingham? Ah, I forget. What does one like me in Birmingham? Ah, I remember. I go to the theatre. I see in the ballet one pretty girl. I laugh to see her piroquette—it was like the English crocodile. But her hair, my friend, it was all gold and silk, like an angel at the bar. Direct, I fall into the love. I make her my friend. I—Ah, I am one other fool. There shall be two sort of men, my friend. One sort is the women, the other sort is the fools. *Voilà la vie.*’

‘Hm!’ growled Gideon, for he was not yet sure how far Mr. Sinon’s philosophy might not be true.

‘On my word of honour as a gentleman,’ said Mr. Sinon, ‘I have but one little house, and that cost me twelve thousand pounds every year. I shall never be rich, like you. Monsieur Aristides has one whole wife and

children—five, six, seven. They cost him not the half what my one little house cost me. It is true he play ; but then it is true he win. I do not play so much ; but then I lose. Last night I lose one thousand pounds. You shall play with me to-night, my friend ; and you shall win.'

' Hm ! ' growled Gideon again, but in another tone. ' I make it a rule never to play with people who always lose ; somehow, one never gets up the winner. I suppose you found time, in the middle of your business, to amuse yourself for five minutes with attending to what you went for ? '

' You English ! Always the business, the business, the business. That make you so rich. But what means business but to pay for the pleasure, eh ? One hour to work—twenty-three hour to live. That is right. You go to the sleep for the ten, and to the business for the fourteen hour, and not to the play for none. Yes, I find one little minute. He is slow—he take fifty-nine second ; I am quick—I take one second. It is done.'

' I supposed so. Well ? '

‘ I order the rifles for the Sultan of Cashgar, you comprehend. They ask no questions ; they are men of business ; Cashgar is a good place of business, the first part of him. I pay more down than they would ask, to begin ; and, in fine, Sinon and Aristides are good names on a bill. They will make the guns so cheap to look like guns, and to be good for at least one bang. Then you run them to Cashgar by the route of Morlaix, and you deliver them to the consignee, and when they have done with the franc-tireurs they shall go to Cashgar, or to Jericho, or to the pieces, if they burst not before. And you ? ’

‘ I’ve spent the price of a dinner in buying the use of a newspaper, only a backwoods sort of rag, but with a strong name for war news just now. I prefer an American paper to work with : war news that has crossed the Atlantic twice is, of course, ten times the value of what only comes once over the Straits of Dover. You see if we don’t get earlier and better French news from Spraggville than anybody else does from Versailles.’

Ah ! If you had bought the “ Times ”

. . . . but we shall do what we can. And the Rentes ?'

'I've not done badly there, but it wasn't by flirting with ballet-girls, I can tell you. By good hard work, I've got hold of a quarter of a million without raising the market a sou. One way and another, we ought to get them up to twice the price before settling day. If we don't clear fifty thousand at least, you'll be about right about our belonging to the fools.'

'Fifty thousand? It is not much, but is better than nothing at all.'

'Would you like to see the memoranda?'

'Oh no, my friend. My poor head is all one ache of champagne. I do not need—I could not comprehend one penny from one pound, and I should add it up all wrong. There is no need of the detail when one deals with the Englishman. If you were a rascal of a Greek—but, in fine, you are Gideon Skull, and not a Greek at all.'

'Then there's nothing more to be said to-day? About the news?'

'We shall leave that to you. You will

know what the sort of American duck you English will like the best to swallow and to pay. I have to take the sherry all the afternoon, for I play to-night, and I must not lose quite so much what I win. You will come? No? It is strange, you so rich ——'

‘That’s just what I’m not, Sinon. I don’t play because I can’t afford to play. I’ve played across the water, but that’s a different thing.’

‘I see. It is that you like to win. Now, as for me, I like to lose. It is that I have the good fortune, you comprehend, in the other way. Oh, you shall win much, if you play with me.’

‘That’s tempting. I do like to win.’

‘Come with me to-night to Juliette, then. She is charming; and you shall find the joli-dogs there once more. What have you to do?’

‘Nothing,’ said Gideon. ‘Well, as you say, one must amuse themselves sometimes. I’ll come for an hour or two, if you’ll lend me a few pounds. One mustn’t go with empty pockets to ladies whose names end in *ette* or

ine ; and I have a particular objection to be thought anything short of a millionaire among people that don't know me. I won't win more than two hundred of you, and you shall pay me a hundred on account now.'

How Gideon Skull never failed to impress everybody, even Greeks from Asia, with a sense of wealth and prosperity, is the only mystery which this book contains. He never failed to have money for the needs of the day, which he never met in a niggardly fashion ; but that was nothing—that feat is constantly achieved, and kept up through a long life, by men who notoriously have not a penny of their own, who never earn one, and whom nobody would trust with one. Perhaps it was partly that he never bragged of wealth, and at the same time never fell into the grand blunder, with which mere cunning so often defeats itself, of making a parade of his poverty. The days are gone by when everybody who called himself poor in and out of season was instantly suspected of being a millionaire—the trick became too stale. No doubt his business look and manner, and his

natural and genuine genius for easy-going and open-speaking honesty, went very far in helping him, while his reserved manner and absence of every sort of affectation went farther still. But even as one may have every detail and attribute of beauty and yet not be beautiful, so one may have every one of these gifts and yet fail to be a Gideon Skull. The reputation for being rich, which sticks to one even when one asks a friend for the fatal loan of half-a-crown, must be inborn, and belong to the harmony of the whole man. Even to Mr. Sinon from Smyrna, Gideon's request for a hundred pounds seemed the most natural thing in the world, oddly as it must have come from any other man. It is true that Gideon, in the most natural way, had given an excellent reason—that it was after banking hours, and he would willingly have paid down a thousand pounds if they were the straw that would turn the scale of Gideon's mind in favour of going to Mademoiselle Juliette's on that or any other evening. His satisfaction with having got an ally like Gideon to play into the hands of his house had hitherto

been a good deal modified by his friend's almost over-respectable aversion to winning and losing except at the great game of which all Europe was the board. Gideon may or may not have known, by reason or instinct, what was passing in Mr. Sinon's mind : the most wonderful thing about genius is the way in which it reaches its ends blindfold, without being able to remember or even to perceive a single step of the road, like the cat who may be carried in a bag to the utmost ends of the earth and yet will find the quickest and straightest way back again to those who flattered themselves that they were rid of her for ever.

Most certainly Gideon did know this—that Mr. Sinon, had he guessed the true state of things, would not only have refused him the hundred pounds, but would have had absolutely nothing to do with him, even as a jackal. He knew perfectly well that they were laughing at him behind his back, as a rich amateur in business whom they could use and fleece, and who could be made to pay for everything that went wrong until all he possessed had passed

into their hands or into those of friendly creditors of their own religion. But he by no means, when he left the office, turned the tables by laughing at the backs of Messrs. Sinon and Aristides. It was all much too serious, and at the same time too simple and natural, for laughter even in one's sleeve. It was in the fitness of things that Greek merchants and American editors and German statesmen should unite and combine to make the fortune of Gideon Skull. For what had the Americans fought one another but to institute a profitable blockade, or at least a blockade that should have been profitable except for subsequent circumstances that genius itself could not foresee? Such mistakes were not likely to happen again. And now, as if he himself had arranged the board, there was a great war in France, an admirable system of neutrality laws in England, and a clever Greek firm at his disposal to make his fortune for him—really his fortune, at last—out of straw. If the speculation in news and Rentes failed, *he* could not lose; for he had nothing to lose. But it could not fail. It

must succeed ; and he would be a capitalist at once, and in due time a millionaire ; and—who knows?—squire of Copleston, and husband of Helen Reid.

Victor Waldron had once called him a sanguine man. And certainly it had happened only too often that his plans, since he had given up pleasure as the great purpose of life, had failed. Otherwise he would not have been living from hand to mouth on a barren reputation for success at forty years old. But it would be hard to say that there was anything over-sanguine here. Everybody was playing into his hands.

Even some happy instinct had led him to get rid of Helen's brother, or at least to get him out of the way before he could guess, not having yet seen Helen, how important it was about to become that she should have no brother for a while. ‘No,’ he thought, ‘I must not produce that will, even if I could lay my hand on it this minute, till there's occasion. I should make her grateful to me all her days, and I should lose her for all mine. As long as the Reids go down and

Rentes go up, I have the whip hand : but the will must be in nobody's hands but mine. I wish I could imagine what it all means ; but I must do without imagining. If there's a will, and there's any flaw about it, such as the Reids and the Waldrons seem to have been in the habit of making, I shall know pretty well what to do. If there's one—I shall know any way what to do with Waldron. I think he'll be sorry not to have paid his debts, one of these days—and the longer I hold it back, the better for me and the worse for him. Helen married—out comes the will at any time ; out of any old lumber-room, or wherever it might be. Let me see—I told her I'd take three days. Considering what sort of an uncle I've got, one ought to do ; and a run down to Copleston won't run away with much of a hundred pounds—I shall have almost enough left to last me till it's time to send Rentes up as high as the sky. Three days ! I'm hanged if I make it two.'

So he turned into the next telegraph office and despatched this message :—‘Skull to Sinon.—Can't come to-night. Must go and

see an old uncle in the country. Back day after to-morrow if all goes well.' Without putting a false word into the message, his instinct felt that Mr. Sinon would translate it into a summons to a rich death-bed. In what other sense could the word 'must' and 'an old uncle in the country' be possibly employed by Gideon—or by anybody else for that matter, according to Mr. Simon's knowledge of the world? Nor would the legatee-like extravagance and haste of putting more than twenty words into the despatch be wholly thrown away.

CHAPTER XV.

In Matters Politic, better it is that we trust them that be over-bold than them that be over-wise For the Complexion of *Mars* his Virtue, saith in his Book *Barochus* of *Florens*, is to guard with Heat and to be glad in his Guarding : but of wise old *Saturn* it is to guard with more of Heed, but yet to be sad and sorrowful therein. Wherefore if thou take a Soldier for thine Heart-fellow, it may be he will lodge thy Secrets on *Caucasus* his Peak where none dare climb albeit some may see them twinkle afar. But if thou take some clerkly Wight, then will he, by divers cunning Shifts and crafty Turnings, bury them as *Dædalus* his Man-Bull where none may see, yet shall Sir *Theseus* coming with his Clew find and gain the same. . . . For the Seeker of Men's Devices climbeth not *Atlas* after them. But the Maze twisteth not whereof thine Enemy, though he halt never so, gathereth not the Clew hard by.

GIDEON SKULL had his share of human weaknesses, and he was far too honest a man to deny them. But Romance was not one of them. His home was not Hillswick, but the world ; so his rare visits to his uncle were most healthily free from those sentimental passages in which the tumble-down church

tower of the little country town in which he had played as a boy and done a great deal worse as a young man might have been expected to take part more or less prominently. Nevertheless, when he left his fly in the George Yard, there was a sort of atmosphere about Hillswick which seemed half new to him and yet half old, as if he were remembering something that had never happened. After all, there must have been some scrap of heart somewhere about his very first flirtation ; and something had happened within the last eight-and-forty hours to put a ghost of life into that long-forgotten atom. As he passed down the lane that led to the rectory, he remembered how, in that very lane, nearly five-and-twenty years ago, his uncle Christopher had caught him arm-in-arm with Sally Green, the carpenter's daughter, and what a storm there had been in Hillswick for a whole week after. To-night was just such a starry evening ; and he wondered, as he half smiled at the thought of that scene, what might or might not have happened if Uncle Christopher had not been quite so much shocked at the sight of a young

man's first evening walk with a girl, even though she was by no means pretty, and though her father was but a carpenter. Perhaps, he thought, if he and she had been well laughed at instead of preached at and scolded and made the town-talk of, things might be rather different with him now, and decidedly better for her. But after a moment he shrugged his shoulders at himself, and went back upon the double track of Helen Reid, almost within reach of one hand, and a good share of at least fifty thousand pounds within grasp of the other. He had not gone near enough to a reverie to prevent him from noticing even such a common object of Hills-wick as old Grimes.

‘Is parson at home?’ he asked, as the clerk and sexton pulled his cap to him.

‘Yes, Mr. Skull,’ said old Grimes, whom experience and tact had taught never to be deaf with Gideon. ‘He’ll be at home.’

‘Any news?’

‘None but a burying to-morrow, Mr. Gideon, and a wedding next day but two.’

‘How do you like the Yankee squire?’

asked Gideon, in the bitter tone that never failed to come when he spoke of his old friend.
‘ I suppose he’s managed to come over you all pretty well by this time, eh ? ’

‘ Come over, is it, Mr. Gideon ? Oh yes, that’s it, if gone off’s come over. I’m nigh eighty, and I never see nor hear tell of such a squire. I don’t see him at all, for that matter. He’s been up in Lun’on all the time he’s been here. He’s not pulled a bell-rope in this church ever since he’s been away ; and as for spending a penny in the place, he’s not done it, Mr. Gideon. That’s bad for trade, I say, though he can’t stop the folk from marrying nor from burying. He may call himself Waldron, but it’s plain Waldron aren’t Reid. Old Harry Reid that I rang into the world and tolled out of it was worth twenty of Squire Waldron.’

‘ Do you mean to tell me that he doesn’t live at Copleston ? I came across the—him, up in town ; but I never supposed he wasn’t living here. . . . So that’s what wanting Copleston for the sake of the people means,’ thought Gideon.

‘Ah, I thought when he first came grubbing and anti-quitting and perigeeing up in the steeple, *he* warn’t writing a county history. I’ve halft a mind to write a county history myself out of the rat-holes, to try and pick up a fortune too. There’s lots more papers, if a man’ld only care to go through, and could pay me my fee—and I’d live in the place, and spend my money on it like a gentleman.’

Gideon was duly welcomed by his aunts as a rich and flourishing nephew who did credit to the family, and, having relieved their minds of the terrors of hospitality by telling them that he should put up at the George as usual for the few days he intended to be in Hillswick, went to look for his uncle in the study. His arrival was always governed by the same forms, down to the same precise words about their having dined early, the larder being just unluckily empty, and the spare bed-room being just in a state of full scour. The curate was always deep in accounts, which he kept with the regularity of clockwork, and with as much inaccuracy as

regularity ; so, as he had perpetual arrears of the most complicated errors in shillings and halfpence to rectify, and was seldom seen but in the profoundest depths of long-division and rule-of-three, no wonder he got the character of being an excellent man of business for a clergyman.

Gideon had not seen his uncle for a considerable time, and noticed that he was looking either worried or unwell. His general air of being a sketch in outline had been increased by the addition of lines and the subtraction of such colour as he had to lose.

‘ And six is three-and-fivepence-halfpenny. Ah, Gideon ! I’m very glad to see you, indeed. You’ve seen your aunts, I suppose ? ’

‘ Oh, yes. I’m taking a day or two’s holiday, but I shall give no trouble : I’m at the George, as usual. Hillswick’s looking much the same. One doesn’t see much sign of the new state of things. Why, I expected to see the High Street turned into another Broadway, and an Athenæum, and a new Church, and an Opera House, under the Yankee rule—or a new town-pump any way.

I don't see a spark of enterprise ; and the George fly was decidedly not new.'

' I am happy to tell you, Gideon, that the exceedingly unpleasant and uncourteous American person who broke my reading lamp and nearly fractured my skull chooses to be non-resident. It is very much for the best that it should be so. It reconciles me to your choice of an American.'

' Ah, yes, old Grimes, whom I met in the lane, told me he hasn't been taking much advantage of his spell of Copleston. But, as you say, all the better for a warming-pan. It's a most extraordinary story, and the more I think of it the more extraordinary it seems to be.'

' Yes,' said Uncle Christopher nervously, ' it is very extraordinary—very strange. Mrs. Reid is a good, well-meaning woman, but I do not think she has been very considerate of Me. It is true that she has considered my flock in the future, and that ought to be enough for me ; and doubtless that is the first thing to be thought of, but it is not the only thing, Gideon. It is a heavy thing for a man

at my age to be made responsible for responsibilities which—which are, in fact, heavy ones. I wish she had taken you into her counsel instead of me.'

'Yes,' said Gideon, 'no doubt it would have been better. But she did not know me, you see, and she did know you.'

'She relied upon my judgment: but—well, it will be a relief to me when everything is put straight again. Excuse me a moment, I must see about getting you a glass of wine after your drive.'

'I'm hanged if I know what to make of it at all!' thought Gideon, as he stood with his back to the empty fireplace in the usual attitude of concentrated meditation. 'That miserable old idiot, Uncle Christopher, has got something on his mind—bah, on his liver—I'll swear. I'd swear that, if it was only because he's gone to get me a glass of wine. When did he ever think of a glass of wine between meals in his life before? He wants the wine, and he wants an excuse for it to the aunts, and the excuse is Me. It can't be that he's got to keep secret that mad

crotchet of Mother Reid : a secret of hers would have made him a happy man. I wonder if he murdered old Harry? By Jove! not a bad notion. What a sight it would be to see Uncle Christopher hanged! It's like enough he's taken to drink, and he looks as if he had a bad touch of the nerves; but he's not the sort of man to spend good money on bad drink for nothing. You are a murderer, Uncle Christopher. You are a second Eugene Aram, scholar and murderer. Or, perhaps, you're a madman? No ; a man can't go out of his mind without a mind to go out of. So you must be a sane and cold-blooded murderer. I'm beginning to get proud of you. I wonder what you'd take to dispose of the Yankee squire, with young Alan to follow. Not much, I dare say. I wonder what you do the trick with,' Gideon's thoughts ran on, too tired with the long journey and too slackened by the sudden plunge from the strain of London into the almost painful quiet of Hillswick for anything but jesting in their own peculiar way. 'Slow poison or a sudden blow? You look most like a poisoner. I shouldn't wonder, if

I opened that bureau, to see a few dozen of *acqua tofana*; or perhaps you invite your victims to dinner, and are clever enough to get them to take a second glass of your wine. I must look out when that wine comes.' His eyes rested idly on the bureau, and his hands took a book from the table no less idly. 'I wonder what you're mixing with the wine that you're so long, or if you're only making it on the premises, or trying to persuade Aunt Sarah to part with the cellar-key? A law-book? Well, I never saw a law-book here before, any more than I ever saw wine between meals—or wine at any time for that matter. Now what can you have been spending money on law-books for—or borrowing them? "Pleading and evidence in Criminal Cases," eh? And with a marker in it, too; stuck in at "Poison," I suppose. Ah, I'm on your traces now, Uncle Christopher. This ought to be worth ten pounds a year to me—"Whosoever shall, either during the life of the Testator or after his Death, steal, or for any fraudulent purpose destroy, cancel, obliterate, or conceal any Will—" By Jupiter Ammon!' cried

Gideon aloud, as he slammed back the book on the table, ‘I’ve got it now ! ’

He thought on, without any more jesting, until his uncle returned with the wine ‘By the way,’ he said, ‘talking of what you were saying, I’ve seen the Reids in town. Do you ever hear from them—from Mrs. Reid ? ’

‘Not often. I hear from Mrs. Reid now and then. I hope they are well.’

‘Then, if you’ve not heard lately, I suppose you don’t know that young Reid has taken a place on a newspaper and gone to Versailles ? ’

‘It is all very extraordinary, Gideon.’

‘It’s more than that, Uncle Christopher. I hope you and the old lady know very well what you’re both about, and have got lawyer’s advice about the matter. I shouldn’t like to be in your shoes if young Reid gets a stray bullet in him. There was a war correspondent killed the other day. . . . Look here, Uncle Christopher; I have been thinking a good deal about the Reids since I met them, and I naturally take an interest in my own relations.

I'm not a lawyer, but I'm a business man, and to know business is much the same as to know law. You mustn't let a madwoman like Mrs. Reid lead you by the nose. I wish——'

'She would not think of such a thing. I have never been led by the nose since I was born. I have always been remarkable for an exceptional degree of moral resolution.'

'I beg your pardon, Uncle Christopher. Of course I know that a man like you would never allow himself to be led by the nose. But, I was going to say, I wish you'd let me see the will. That's all.'

'The *what*, Gideon ? '

'Old Harry Reid's will. You needn't look so scared, Uncle Christopher. I'm not likely to get my own uncle sent to gaol. I only want to see that everything will be safe for you if anything happens to young Reid. Of course the mother will be safe from everything but a lunatic asylum, if the story of Copleston ever comes to be known.'

'You've seen the Reids ? Mrs. Reid *has* been consulting you ? '

Gideon thought for a moment whether it

might not be advisable to claim Mrs. Reid's authority for his information and for his right to advise. But his natural honesty prevailed.

'No, Uncle Christopher. She has said nothing to me. But in business we learn a knack of putting things together, that's all. Concealing wills is felony, you know; and a mad woman's sure to be cunning enough to manage so as to throw the responsibility on you. Young Reid might be merciful to his mother's infirmities; but I don't think you'd ever be able to make him understand that a clergyman, resolute and clear-sighted like you, who kept him out of his rights for the best seven years of his life, ought to be easily forgiven. I know what I should feel, or any man.'

'Gideon,' said his uncle eagerly, 'you are wrong—quite wrong. I've examined the statute over and over again, and made all the inquiries I could, and it is clear—quite clear—that in a case like this, where there is no fraudulent intent—those are the very words,' he went on, opening his law-book nervously and handing it to his nephew, 'there is no crime. "For any fraudulent purpose," those

are the words, you see. You can't call it a fraudulent purpose to help a woman to—to—carry out the best intentions. I have gone through it over and over again.'

'Yes—I see the words—"Penal servitude"—"Not less than three years"—"Fraudulent purpose"—"presumed." I wish I were a lawyer. But if you think the law will acquit you on the ground that somebody else meant well, I feel pretty sure you're wrong.'

'But my own intentions are good too, Gideon; they are excellent intentions. In undertaking this responsibility, most unwillingly, but unavoidably——'

'Uncle Christopher! You will never make this evil-thinking and scandalous world believe that an elderly clergyman, of exceedingly small private means, concealed a will merely because somebody told him to do so, and without a view to his own advantage in some way. You may get the Attorney-General to argue it for you for ten years, and you won't change the nature of the world. You know so much of the other world, Uncle Christopher—there's a common notion about

what use they make of good intentions there Any way, in this world, they pave a good many gaols with them.'

' You—you think—*that?*' faltered Uncle Christopher, gulping down the rest of his wine.

' Well—I can't mince matters—I do. But I can't be sure without seeing the will. I hope it's safe, wherever it may be. Those things have a knack of turning up where they're least expected, you know. And if young Reid, who's no fool, ever gets a hint from his mother—who *is*, and a woman into the bargain—well, there'll be the devil to pay. Of course it leaves everything to him, and something to Helen—Miss Reid. Old Harry would have only one idea of will-making. I don't suppose he's made me a legatee—I don't suppose you've been defrauding your own flesh and blood, Uncle Christopher. Who are the executors ?'

' Mrs. Reid and I —'

' The devil you are ! I beg your pardon, but it's enough to make the nephew of an angel swear. Well, it's too late for anything now

but to keep you safe, and to manage that the will, when it's wanted, shall be by the merest chance in the world—where is it, this will ? '

‘ I have pledged my solemn word, Gideon
———,

‘ Come, uncle—be a man ; I declare it's monstrous, the way in which Mrs. Reid has been treating you. Upon my soul, I shouldn't wonder if you'd got it put away in that very bureau. You've kept whatever promise she got you to make only too well—it's not your fault that a man of the commonest common-sense has been able to see through a pane of glass, for it's been nothing more. What's the good of keeping a secret in a box with a glass lid, I'm hanged if I can see. Alan Reid isn't your nephew, you know. Any way, I supposed you never promised not to tell the terms. I don't like to see a man like you the slave of any woman, Uncle Christopher.’

What man, unless he be the strongest in a thousand, can bear to be told that he is a woman's slave ? Gideon nearly succeeded in striking a spark of anger out of Uncle Christopher. ‘ Slave—eh ? What's that ? Slave ?

Ah, I suppose because you think I give way to your aunts for the sake of peace and quietness, I couldn't take my own way if I pleased? They are aware of it, too. They know, if I really wanted to do a thing, I'd do it—only, you see, those great occasions very seldom occur, and, whenever they don't, why should a man throw away his superior strength in trivial contentions about such domestic matters as—as—the cellar-key? If Mrs. Reid thinks she can order me about and make me liable for her consequences, then I say she is taking a most unwarrantable liberty, which I, for one, will not allow.'

'Ah, that's speaking like a man, now. Let me see, nobody's so young as to count on living out the next seven years, or the next six years, even. It would be a pretty affair, if Alan Reid were to die without a will from not knowing that he had anything to leave. Who'd get Copleston then?—if he died unmarried, I mean?'

Uncle Christopher nearly choked himself with another gulp of wine, as a protest against the accusation of being a victim to petticoat

tyranny. He seemed growing reckless in his old age, and it must have been an intense relief to him to unburden himself of one more fragment of the secret to which the bare letter of his loyalty to his hopes of the living did not bind him. ‘Miss Reid. Most unquestionably Miss Reid. She would be his heir-at-law.’

‘By Jupiter Ammon, Uncle Christopher, I wouldn’t be in your best boots for ten thousand pounds if you ever get into hot water with Miss Helen. That young woman’s got devil enough in her for ten : and she’s as sharp as a million needles. Why, if there’s a secret within a hundred miles of her, she’ll work it out—I’m saying what she *has* done. And if there’s anything to be got by it, she’ll do it again. She’s hard on the track as it is ; and though she might spare her own mother, I’ll eat my own worst boots if she’ll spare you. She’s not a girl of the Reid pattern, I can tell you. I hope you don’t keep that will on the premises, Uncle Christopher. If you do, she’ll ferret it out, as sure as you’re a living man. Now, if I had it, I could keep it in my own

office safe, which is just the last place anybody would look for it in.'

'Eh? You?' Gideon somehow felt that his offer had been made the slightest shade of a degree too soon, and that he had, by the same amount, overrated his uncle's confidence in him. It does not answer to treat any man as if he were wholly imbecile. His uncle could not and did not suspect him: but this sudden generous offer to take the chances of all sorts of trouble upon his own shoulders did not seem quite characteristic of Gideon. He had just enough ear for harmony of character to feel that a false note had jarred him, though he had not enough to tell how or why.
'You? I am much obliged to you, Gideon. But it is quite safe in the bank here. Nobody will look for it there.'

'Perhaps not—perhaps not, uncle,' said Gideon, more vexed that the will was not in the house than that his offer had been refused.
'Banks *are* safe—unless they happen to smash, or get broken into, or burn; or unless Miss Helen finds out where it is from her mother, and comes down to Copleston and fascinates

the bank manager. Or unless—but, well, none of these things *may* happen in the next seven years. I wouldn't choose a county-bank for a hiding-hole myself—but then, of course, your experience is greater than mine you old idiot !' thought Gideon. 'But, well,—things are found when one knows where they are.'

CHAPTER XVI.

Oh whaur's the tune o' heather bells?
 An' whaur's the gowd o' broom?
 An' whaur's the glee the lavrock tells
 When hearts are leir an' toom?
 'Tis then sae brawly frae the flure
 The nettle pouks her sting
 As a' the flowers the muirlan' bure
 When love was wed wi' Spring.

The nettle decks hersel' wi' green
 An' thinks her Queen ower a':
 Quo' she, nae lady e'er was seen
 Sae sheensome an' sae braw.
 Oh, whaur's the guid when Hearts fa' wrang?
 An' when the lavrock's fain
 To lilt aboon his soarin' sang
 She gars him croon her ain.

THE end of Helen's thoughts was to sit down and write a letter :

' Dearest Bertha,—It is so long since you heard from me that you must have forgotten that there is anybody named Helen in the world. The fact is, I forget it myself, sometimes ; but, whenever I remember it, I am

selfish enough to hope that she is not quite forgotten by everybody within a drive from her old home. As I don't want you to skip the whole of my letter, I'll begin at the end, so you'll have no excuse for not reading what comes afterwards. So, in the first and last place, I am, dearest Bertha, your most loving Helen. In the last place but one, I fancy you will still care a little to know that Alan has left us, and gone to Paris, or, at least, as near to Paris as the Parisians will let him. But don't think he has done anything so romantically desperate as to turn soldier. His duties are, first and foremost, to keep out of harm's way, and, secondly, either to find adventures or make them. He has gone out to write letters for an American newspaper, and I am glad of it, for he needs any sort of man's life, and I'm sure was being bored and worried to death with us two useless women. I know wild steam-engines wouldn't drag that out of him, but *I* have felt it, and have been hating myself for being one of them. He is very patient and very kind and very brave, but he has given up telling any of his thoughts

and feelings even to me. But I know, dear Bertha, a great deal of what he *does* feel. I was very much surprised and hurt, too, that he left Copleston without wishing you good-bye. I could not understand it at all; and I dare say you think of my brother—whatever you may think of me, and if you think of him, at all—only as a light-brained, ill-mannered nobody not worth remembering. Well, you know my flighty ways, and how I never could see anything go crooked without trying to put it straight, and, in short, all about Helen Reid, and above all how she cares for nobody on earth as she does for her brother and her old friend. By all means forget him, but let it be in a just way. I have found out why he did not say good-bye to you; and though I can't tell you why, I *can* tell you that if I were a girl he cared for, I don't know whether I should have been angry with him: I think I should; but I should have honoured him. Men's reasons are almost always absurd, but they can't help their nature, and we must be content with their meaning well. All by myself I have found out that he most deliberately avoided even seeing you for what he thought

was honour's sake and out of respect for you. You know I would not ask you to think kindly of him if I did not know that you may, and if you didn't know you might trust me in this as I would trust you. Don't make things more bitter for me by making me feel that there are misunderstandings and misjudgments between the only two people for whom —except, of course, myself—I care. And please don't answer me by saying “What in the world are you making such a fuss about? I'm sure I never thought about it at all.” For I'm sure you must have thought a little about one who *you know* liked you as Alan did, and who left you *because* he loved you, and because he *does*, as *I* know.

‘How I should like to see you again! I don't suppose you'd make me feel that things were so very much changed. Mamma is a miracle of content; and I have no particular wish for myself, except that I could turn myself into a young man. I should make a better one than Alan, a long way. I should go straight to the girl I loved, and say, “Here I am, penniless, useless, nameless, everythingless. Marry me.” And then I'd go to my enemy, with her

glove in my hat, and smite him hip and thigh. But I can't do it ; and in these days Rosalind and the Spanish Nun and Joan of Arc and Imogen would be misunderstood, and set down as being sadly improper. Something, of course, I must do ; but I'm in the hardest position a girl was ever in. Whatever I do, it must be what Alan would approve of, and what would not oblige me to leave mamma, especially now that Alan is away. I'm no companion to her, but it would not do to leave her all alone. Why can't I sing, or play the piano, or draw, or act, or sew, or turn pirouettes, or write novels, or cook, or do a single thing that other girls can ? Why, I don't know enough of such things even to teach them ; so, from what I see in London, my knowledge must be small indeed. I'm a downright plebeian in my notions, but both mamma and Alan are so terribly proud that I believe they'd rather see me elope than trying to teach other girls how to behave themselves. What should *you* do ?

‘ And, please, I should like to hear something about Copleston. We never talk of it in our new home, or hear of it from anybody.

What sort of a man is Mr. Waldron? Have you yet become acquainted with him? Has he given any parties yet, and have you been to them? If you have, how odd it must have seemed to you, who knew the old place in the old times! I do really want to know all you can tell me about Mr. Waldon. Who have they said is to be Mrs. Waldron? Somebody, of course, and not Miss Bolt, I suppose. Or is he to bring you a nasal lady from beyond the sea?

'I suppose nobody asks after us, not even old Grimes? If you come across him when you chance to be shopping in Hillswick, remember me to him. Do let me have a line at once, dear Bertha, to let me know what you are doing, and how you all are, and all about everything. I forgive you for not writing sooner, because you didn't know our address, and I was ashamed to let you know it for Alan's behaviour's sake. But I'm not now. This is a terribly long letter—too many words and too little sense in them ; but there is *some* sense near the top of the first page. Do write soon, and believe me—as I said before—your most loving HELEN.

‘Do tell me all about Copleston.’

It was a very mixed letter indeed. Helen had been seized with an impulse to do something exceedingly politic, had then forgotten herself in her earnestness about Alan, and had so gone on, alternating between impulsive policy and politic impulse to the end, when she remembered her first intention and put it into a postscript of just six words. The letter was very unintentionally sincere, and yet Bertha might look in vain for what was written between the lines. However, it was safe to be answered, and something of Bertha’s mind Helen must needs know before setting to work in earnest for Alan. She did not think that the woman lived who could be faithless in her heart to Alan; but still she had been wrong in so many things that she might be wrong again—and if Bertha were lost, she felt that Copleston might just as well be lost too, so far as any good to Alan was concerned. And as Victor Waldron must be the centre of all her plans, whatever they might be, she must study the force and nature of the enemy and his country from more trustworthy sources

than the reports of Gideon Skull, whose views were coloured by enmity and were only a man's. If Bertha would act as her innocent spy, she would learn a thousand little things, infinitely more important than great ones, which only a woman can tell because only a woman would dream of seeing them.

And what could an answer from Bertha Meyrick to Helen Reid prove but the warmest of invitations to spend the time of Alan's absence at Thorp End, where the Meyricks lived, within an easy drive of Hillswick and Copleston? Alan would not have permitted such a visit for an instant, but he was away, and could not object for months to come. Mrs. Reid would no doubt be more than unwilling to accept, and to return in such a manner to the neighbourhood of her old home; but, thought Helen, she will hardly have the heart to say No to the first piece of pleasure that has come to me; and she will herself be glad, in her heart, to escape from this useless life in London, which means nothing, now that Alan has gone. And, once in the enemy's country, though but on its outskirts, many

chances might come—some must come—and it would be her own fault if she lost one. It would clearly be her own fault if she never came across Victor Waldron again, either at Thorp End, where he would of course be an occasional visitor, or in Hillswick, or at any rate somewhere. And then, with the effect of her unintentional experiment upon Gideon Skull fresh upon her, it would be scarcely less her fault if Victor Waldron himself did not end the war by suing at her feet for leave to make any sort of terms.

It was all for Alan. What did it signify what happened to her, whatever the terms might be? She had ceased to respect herself enough to feel any hurt or harm about selling herself into downright slavery, had that been in question, for the sake of Alan. Of what use was she in the whole world except to do all things and suffer all things for him? Of vanity and presumption, her plan had no more than Cleopatra's when she sailed down the Nile to conquer Antony. She knew her power, and knowledge can never be vain. Gideon Skull had taught her the first letters of a new alphabet, and the

most universal and natural of instincts, forced by desperate necessity, had taught her the rest from the beginning to the end. There was as much presumption in her as in creatures that have suddenly found out the use of their bright skins or plumes and their sharp claws, and no more vanity than in a falcon, who hunts not for herself but for her master. She was feeling towards Waldron just then as a falcon to a kite. What girl needs age or experience to learn, with knowledge, the exact measure of her own power? Only, most happily learn it from actual or possible love, and not from hate and its needs.

Mrs. Reid's plan for her children's welfare was certainly working well enough to some sort of end.

The letter was hardly off Helen's mind when one came from Alan, who had not yet reached the point between Dover and Versailles where private correspondence would have to cease for a time. It came from the Fleet Street office for Mrs. Reid, and had been written in pencil on the road, full of haste and good spirits. Helen chose to consider the

spirits forced. Mrs. Reid would have been better pleased had he written less like a schoolboy on a holiday. He had not yet seen more than the merest outskirts of a country with an enemy in its heart, and he had as yet found no adventures worth recording except a few difficulties about getting forward. He had never been out of England in his life before, nor ever had occasion to speak in French to a Frenchman, so that his difficulties would have proved real adventures —so he wrote—had it not been for his luck in having for travelling companion a capital fellow named Gray, who knew a good deal about France and French ways, and who was going to the siege for fun, and who had helped him through his first ‘*Argus*’ letter in splendid style. The weather was splendid. And Helen decidedly made up her mind not to make a single extract from her brother’s letter for the benefit of Bertha. It is to be hoped that Alan’s first letter to the ‘*Argus*’ gave more satisfaction than his first letter home.

Nothing of real consequence had happened when, well within the three days after his

first visit, Gideon Skull called again. People always assume that the forms of such visits will repeat themselves for ever after the precedent of the first, and Gideon was put out by not finding Helen alone. It had not occurred to him that seeing Helen except in her mother's presence was not to be counted on; and when he found the two ladies together, he also found himself unprepared with an excuse for calling. Mrs. Reid, too, looked by no means encouraging, and received him with the stiffest of bows and a look of surprise at his appearance which meant anything but welcome. But he noticed also that Helen coloured when he entered, and that was even better than he had looked for. She vexed at such an accident, was ashamed of the shame which the sight of Gideon, for no cause of which she could possibly be conscious, made her feel. Well, it should be for the last time. She would take good care not to change colour in that way again, or without good practical reason. What shame should or could there be in seeing Gideon Skull when—seeing it was all for Alan—there was none in feeling and

thinking what he had made her think and feel during these two nights and days ?

‘I—I suppose you are surprised to see me here, Mrs. Reid,’ said Gideon, with uncharacteristic discomposure, while he tried to study Helen’s looks without appearing to pay any special heed to her. Some men, and all women, can do that very cleverly ; but then all women have tact, and some men have cunning, and Gideon was without either. So he looked and stammered like a big, rough man who has fallen into first love, and does not know how to behave himself under such new conditions. ‘The fact is—well I was passing, and I thought perhaps —— Have you heard from young—from your son ?’

And, no doubt, the fact was that he had been passing, and that he had been thinking, and his question was natural, and neither logically nor grammatically connected with his passing and thinking. But, with the usual perversity of all Gideon’s words and ways, what was simple, literal, grammatical truth gave Mrs. Reid the impression of meaning what a lie could

not have made them seem to mean half so well. It was perfectly natural that the man who had got Alan his place should have some polite curiosity as to how Alan was faring. She ceased to be surprised at the impudence implied by a morning call made by Gideon Skull upon the widow and daughter of Mr. Reid of Copleston, but she was anything but unobservant with her quick Welsh eyes, and something about the set of Gideon's neck as he spoke to her, but only half towards her, made her doubly determined that this call, at least, should be his last. Nor had she been quite blind to Helen's look when Gideon first came in. She did not forget that long interview of the day before yesterday, nor what Helen had said about him afterwards. Sidelooks and sudden flushes, however meaningless and accidental, should not pass between Gideon Skull and the sister of Alan.

'He is very well, I thank you,' said Mrs. Reid, in her most icily graceful way.

'You've heard from him, then?' said Gideon, more like himself, for her high-and-mightiness was certainly not the way to put

him down. ‘That’s well. I’ll see that you get the “*Argus*” regularly——’

‘Thanks. But I won’t give you so much trouble. I dare say Mr. ——, the man in the office, will let me buy it. I believe Miss Reid has already thanked you for all the trouble you have taken with my son?’

‘Yes. More than enough. A great deal more. It’s not worth mentioning.’

The talk, such as it was, broke down. Helen, having planned out her own campaign on her own account, seemed to have no wish for a private talk with Gideon. Mrs. Reid was very certain that such a thing should not happen, and Gideon did not know how to bring one about, while he had made up his mind very distinctly that he was not going to leave the house without one. It can only seem odd that a man who playing chess with such large pieces on so great a board should be unable to manage a couple of inexperienced women in so small a matter; but so it was, strange or no: and perhaps, after all, it was very far from strange. Other men than the Reverend Christopher Skull have found that the force of

great minds and iron will has its limits where the question of a five minutes' *tête-à-tête* or the control of a cellar-key comes into question.

'I have just come from Hillswick,' at last said Gideon to Mrs. Reid, but at Helen, so that she might understand how he had not been letting the grass grow in her cause.

'Indeed?' said Helen.

'Yes,' said Gideon.

Mrs. Reid said nothing. And down went the talk again.

At last even Gideon had to own himself beaten, and rose. Mrs. Reid gave him her hand coldly and stiffly, and rang the bell. He lingered a little and then went to the door. 'Is there any way I can be of use to you now your son is gone?' he asked.

'None, thank you,' said Mrs. Reid. He began to feel like an injured man, who was being treated ungratefully. But holding the door-handle was only waste of time.

'I'm on my way to the "Argus,"' he tried again. 'I will let you know anything I hear there.' And before Mrs. Reid could say 'No, thank you,' again, he was gone. At any rate

he had established a basis for calling, and he had made up his mind that Helen was worth even being patient for.

Mrs. Reid sighed with relief as she heard the street-door slam rather more loudly and fiercely than the latch required.

‘Helen,’ she said, ‘I shall certainly give orders that we are not at home whenever that horrid man calls again. Your father would never have let him enter his door. I am not grateful to him for sending Alan abroad, and I will have nothing to do with him.’

‘I suppose he has meant to be kind,’ said Helen.

‘I’m afraid, unless he has changed very much, that a great many people have thought that, and have found themselves wrong. There is no right reason, absolutely none, for his taking an interest in us. Indeed I am not wrong, Helen, nor uncharitable. I dislike him and I distrust him, and the less reason one can give for such feelings the more there is sure to be. This is the first time I have seen him for twenty years, and the moment he came in—I felt——’

‘What could you possibly feel about Mr. Skull, mamma? If he was not so big and so slow, he would be like any other commonplace fellow-creature.’

‘I can’t put just what I felt into words. But there is no need. We could not take help from him even if we needed it; and, as we could not take his help, or use him, or repay him, or even endure him, I do not choose to be at the mercy of visits which he would not make without a motive. I know what I mean very well. Under no circumstances will I allow you to have anything whatever to do with Gideon Skull.’

Helen had by no means the same impression about Gideon. She had already made all the use of him she required, and by no means wished to embarrass her movements with such an ally. Perhaps it was as well that her mother should take this view of him, for she no longer attached a sense of awe, mystery, and destiny to the name of Gideon Skull. He had turned out a very manageable piece of mere common clay after all, who had entered her life with a tremendous flourish of

trumpets merely for the purpose of answering a question.

But, in the course of the evening, and precisely in the course of a particular five minutes when her mother happened to be out of the room, the maid-servant brought her a pencil note in an unknown hand, which, she was told, had just been left at the door.

‘ Dear Miss Reid,—Of course you understood when I called this afternoon that it was to see *you* and *alone*. I have been acting on the persuasion that you meant, with all your soul and strength, every word you said when you told me there was nothing you were not prepared to do for your brother. I told you I would see you again in three days. I have something of the utmost importance to say to you—and I *must* say it to you *alone*. You understand. I have taken care that this shall be delivered to you when you are by yourself. For your sake, as I choose to put it, for your brother’s sake, if you prefer it, you will give me an interview, so that we may speak for at least five minutes without being disturbed. I will call on you if you will name an hour.

You can send me word to care of Messrs. Aristides and Sinon, Woodenhorse Yard. If you are never sure of being by yourself indoors, I will meet you elsewhere—you can easily call at the “Argus” office for news of your brother, and I will be there at any hour to-morrow you name. I have to say what I cannot write, but which it is needful you should know.—G.S.’

Helen did not merely flush this time. She turned hot all over. Whatever was to be known she *must* know, whatever it might cost her. What could it be that could not be written, and which required so much mystery? Yes—she must see Gideon Skull, and learn what might possibly change all her plans of action. Had he used the time to such good purpose as to have discovered the nature of Waldron’s fraud, or learn that the law was, after all, on the side of the right instead of the wrong? When she, perhaps, already had it in her power to do all things for Alan at one stroke, who was she that she should let prudish instincts and technical obedience to an unreasonable command keep her from meeting

the man who had been forging her armour? Of course her mother must not be allowed to guess at what was going on for her sake and for Alan's. She knew well enough that her mother would rather lose Copleston for Alan than let his sister steal out on a false pretence to meet Gideon Skull alone. Of any danger but her mother's knowledge she had absolutely no fear. But—in spite of all things—her cheeks and forehead flamed, as if she were doing a mean thing, and not for Alan, as she wrote her answer for the post:—

‘At the “Argus” to-morrow at 12.—H. R.’

CHAPTER XVII.

I am the Knight of Malavis:
In sooth, a right adventurer :
For fifty years with rein and spur
I ride the hills, nor take mine ease.
For battle doth my body please,
And all my comfort keeps therein—
I've found no hour for sweeter sin :
I am the Knight of Malavis.

No lore have I of maiden's kiss—
No maiden yet I've happed to see :
I am not rich as robbers be,
For still I lose whate'er I seize.
But armed I am from eyes to knees,
And I will keep her, when I find
A maid whose lips may mate my mind :
I am the Knight of Malavis.

HER son robbed of the love which was his true chance of manhood, and driven to do what was not his duty in a sphere of life to which he had not been called—her daughter driven among the rocks and shoals of concealment, deceit, and unscrupulous scheming—a well-intentioned clergyman frightened out of his

wits—an innocent man tricked by the phantom of a fortune—these were what Mrs. Reid's plan for the correction of Providence had to show for itself hitherto. And these were all, if we omit its probable result in its advantage to Gideon Skull ; for in so far as it was likely to be of some sort of good to somebody, it cannot be looked upon as wholly in vain. If Mrs. Reid could have lifted the least corner of the cloth that hid from her eyes everything that was going on just under them, and seen the maze of loss, corruption, and peril that was growing from the seed she had sown with such good intentions, she would have been horrified at what she had been the means of doing ; she certainly would not have let Helen go out alone the next morning.

Helen did not feel good as she left the house to keep her appointment with Gideon Skull. It felt like doing a great thing—like visibly and consciously cutting her life in two. It had been easy enough, in solitude, to dream of rising to great, vague crimes, and of descending to the meanest depths, and to triumph in them beforehand because they would be all

for Alan. But none of her enthusiasm helped her when the time came for action, and when she found herself obliged, not to plunge a dagger into somebody's heart, but only to hide from her mother the real object of her walk that morning. Her imagination had never led her to the point of having to do anything so wretchedly small—so small that not even its being for Alan's sake could give it dignity. She was only a sly girl, with a lie in her heart and almost on her lips, creeping out to meet a man whom her mother had forbidden her to know ; and it was all the worse because there was no hint or dream of love in the affair, and because it was for a brother who would have given up even his dreams of Bertha rather than believe his sister capable of anything so Reid-like and so mean. But what could she do—being she ? She had committed herself to this appointment, or thought so ; and supposing that she lost a chance for Alan by not keeping it, how would she ever forgive herself all her days ? Her mother's daughter, who grew more and more like that

mother every day, was not likely to give up any sort of design which might lead to a good end, through whatever rocks and bogs the road to that end might lead her. She did not doubt or waver in the depth of herself even in such a miserably little matter as keeping a secret tryst with Gideon. She felt, in her extreme way, that she was closing the street-door upon her ladyhood ; and she felt, too, that she was making the first step down that road of which the first step alone is hard. But—well, it might prove better for Alan, in the long-run, that she should teach herself as soon as possible not to be ashamed of little things. She had no doubt of being able to trust herself in great ones. What lay before her, whatever course it might take, was not to be work for a lady's hand. It could only have been a very invisible and deep-lying instinct indeed which told her how much a first secret meeting with Gideon must needs be—indeed the last thing which one who prided herself on her ladyhood would dream of doing.

But it was all for Alan. In one great thing she and her mother were one.

It is not far, as all the world knows, to Fleet Street from the Strand, so that she could keep her interview easily without being long away from home, while to meet on the way anybody who knew her was happily impossible. Since she had been in London she had been out by herself on common errands dozens of times ; but, naturally, never to the eastward of Temple Bar, though it was not many stones'-throw distant. The city gate was standing in those days, and its arch, as she passed under it, seemed to her mind the symbol of another gateway on the road along which her mind was passing. She half lingered, as if the presence of a visible gateway warned her that another road than the street changed its name beyond, and that it divided two cities which were not merely London and Westminster. That is to say, her pace slackened, for she could not really linger ; and she breathed more freely when she had once passed through. It was as if Helen Reid had entered the archway, and had never come out again ; as if she who left its shadow was either not Helen Reid, or else had left a

burdensome and troublesome part of herself on the other side. She felt quite certain that henceforth—for Alan's sake—she would never be troubled with scruples again about such a trumpery matter as going out without saying why or where. She must have been terribly frank and open—once—to feel so changed and hardened by what very few would regard as being so much as a mere common, every-day lie. No—she had already done enough to know that she could never feel like Alan's sister, or old Harry Reid's daughter, any more.

She had little difficulty in finding the outside of the office of the '*Argus*,' and was too well provided with an excuse for calling to feel over-shy about entering. She had absolutely no views about what sort of place a newspaper office was likely to prove. Strange as such an idea may seem to some, she would not have been astonished to find the '*Times*' itself issued from some small news-shop, so that she drew no moral from the contrast between the surroundings of the '*Argus*' and the tremendous character of the organ by means

of which Spraggville ruled the world. She tapped gently at the door to which she had been guided, and was answered by a ‘Come in !’ in an accent which reminded her a little of the voice of her enemy, Victor Waldron.

She looked round for Gideon. But she found nobody but Mr. Crowder and Mr. Sims, whom she knew neither by sight nor by name.

Neither face moved a muscle at the unexpected appearance of a young lady in the rooms of the ‘Argus,’ except for a slight frown which passed over that of Mr. Sims. His once immaculate chief, he could not help thinking, was going a great deal too far—neglecting duty to dine with lords, showing unmistakable signs of it the next morning, and now visited by young women. It was becoming a case for watching in the interests of the ‘Argus,’ if not for the serious consideration of the Platonic Institute of Spraggville, to which they both belonged, where young men and young women of an intellectual turn met to discuss social philosophy from a purely spiritual and sympathetic point of view, and never made love

except in spectacles. Well, the blight of the aristocratic upas must produce its natural poison. From dining with lords to drinking champagne, from champagne to whisky, from whisky to assignations, were but steps in a chain which might lead at last even to smoking cigars, before it had run out to the bitter end. One can hardly tell why Helen's visit should instantly, and without the faintest evidence, have presented itself in this light to Mr. Sims. But so it was: and he wavered between waiting and watching on the one hand, and pointedly rising and leaving the office on the other, to show his colleague that he understood the situation perfectly.

‘Is this the office of the “Argus”? ’ asked Helen. ‘I am Miss Reid. I came to ask if—if you had heard from my brother.’ Perhaps Gideon would not come, after all.

‘Be seated, Madam,’ said Mr. Crowder. ‘I hope you are very well. Let me see—Reid—Reid. Yes; our correspondent at the siege. You will pardon me—with so many names to think of, and with such a war on my hands, it is not easy to keep my mind upon indi-

viduals. Have we heard from Reid, Mr. Sims ?'

'Wired it yourself to Spraggville yesterday,' said Mr. Sims bluntly. He was beginning to suspect his chief of being a little of an impostor, and of giving himself lordly airs, and it galled him.

'That is so,' said Mr. Crowder. 'It was a good letter. I am happy to tell *you*, Miss Reid, that your brother, under careful editing, is likely to give satisfaction to the city of Spraggville. He is the first English literary man I have happened on who seems to understand what we want and the way to put things. There were some touches in his last letter that were worthy of an American.'

'I am very glad indeed,' said Helen, too indifferent to wonder at her brother's sudden success in so unlikely a direction, and by no means proud of Mr. Crowder's praise. Of course, whatever Alan undertook to do he would do well—that went without saying; but she could feel no elation at his turning out what she could only consider a first-rate travelling clerk to this fellow-countryman of

her enemy. She could not be just, and would have been offended by hearing that Niagara, since it was in Waldron's hemisphere, is the largest waterfall in the world, and makes the loudest noise.

She hardly knew whether to drag out the interview till Gideon should come, or to leap at his non-appearance as a sign that he was not coming and to hurry back through Temple Bar. But she was saved the difficulty of deciding by the voice of Gideon himself at the door. After all, the clocks were not many minutes on their way past noon.

‘Miss Reid !’ he said, dividing a nod between Mr. Sims and Mr. Crowder, and holding out his hand to Helen with a curious mixture, which struck even her, of eagerness and awkwardness together. He had not said, ‘Who would have thought of meeting you here?—certainly not I,’ for that would have been hypocritical, and therefore impossible for Gideon Skull. But his ‘Miss Reid !’ had implied it all, and Helen was thankful to him for not claiming an appointment with her. ‘Are you going to write for the “*Argus*” too?

Well, Crowder, how's news to-day? Don't let me drive you off, Miss Reid. I am not going to stay a minute, and I have something to say to you, if you'll let me walk part of your way. I hope you're not too well off for news, Crowder, for I've picked up a crumb for you that will make the hair of all Spraggville stand on end, and glorify the old "Argus" for ever.'

'I shall be pleased to hear, sir, whatever you may have to say,' said Mr. Crowder.

'I dare say you would. But none of you fellows have any pluck, you see. No, not one of you. If I had the misfortune to edit a newspaper, I should make a point of coming out with a first-class prophecy of the most tremendously unlikely sort every ninth day. Nobody remembers failures. Look at the weather almanacs; if I brought out one of those, I'd prophesy a snowstorm in July regularly every year. It would come at last, and I should be rich and famous for ever. And in war and politics you'd have the pull that the unlikeliest forecasts are right in nine cases out of ten. No, you actual editors have no pluck; not one of you.'

‘It is the first time I have heard the “Spraggville Argus” charged with deficiency in pluck, Mr. Skull,’ said Crowder.

‘Yes, because there’s nobody who knows what pluck means, I dare say. Now, if I was to tell you Bismarck was shot, you’d wire it off to Spraggville, because it might be likely even if it mightn’t be true. But you wouldn’t dare to fix a date for the sortie from Paris which is to break the German cordon and fix a communication between the army of the South and the capital. You wouldn’t do that even if you knew. Now, I would, even if I didn’t know. That’s pluck, and that’s the difference between me and you. By George! Think of Spraggville if I fixed it for Tuesday week. If I wasn’t Gideon Skull, I’d be owner of the “Argus” for twice nine days after.’

‘Mr. Skull,’ said Mr. Crowder with dignity, ‘my experience as a journalist is not quite so small as you appear to conclude; and I guess you must be out and around before twelve o’clock if you wish to be beforehand with me or with Mr. Sims. Before sailing for Europe I drew up a programme of

this war, the results of which might surprise you. It has often enabled me to anticipate events, as well as to correct the accounts of our correspondents on both sides. I do not say that such a sortie is inconsistent with that programme, but I do say, and Mr. Sims will confirm that view, that—not to beat about the bush, Mr. Skull, which is not American, it is my duty to inquire if you intend that sortie to be taken as a fact, and, if so, what your views may be in bringing it to this journal?’

‘Ah, Crowder, there’s no doing you. Yes, I do want to get that wired to Spraggville,’ said Gideon frankly. ‘The fact is, I’m engaged rather deeply in relation to the neutrality laws—you understand. In the rifle and provision line. Instincts of an old blockade-runner will out, you see. The army of the South is my customer just now, and I naturally get to know more than there can be on anybody’s programme. For obvious financial reasons I want that sortie to succeed ; but for equally obvious reasons I want to be very particular to the *wrong* day. Now, I happen to know, as a fact, that Bismarck never passes

a morning without reading right through every word in the “Argus” about the war. He and Moltke will take that Tuesday week for granted, you may be sure; and no doubt there’ll be a rehearsal—what soldiers call a demonstration—on that day. The “Argus” will be out by a day or two about the real day, of course; but who’ll heed a day or two when they talk of the prophecy fulfilled? There, I’ve made a clean breast of it. It’s all in my own interest, of course, so take it or leave it as you please. I’d take it if I were you. I’m worth gratifying, I can tell you; a man who’s bound up with the big French guns, and behind their scenes, can give plenty of pickings as true as this to any paper that’s got pluck and go and isn’t afraid of big things. Come and have another feed with me and Ovoca on Saturday. He’s taken a wonderful fancy to you. Can you forgive me for keeping you waiting all this while, Miss Reid? I’m at your service now whenever you please.’

‘Surmised,’ said Mr. Sims as soon as their visitors had gone, ‘Gideon Skull didn’t give an earl for dinner without wanting to be paid.’

‘I am surprised, Sims,’ said Mr. Crowder, ‘that you should see in a piece of simple courtesy more than there is to be seen. It shows a want of knowledge of the world. A British lord, I take it, does not lay himself open to misconstruction when he admits himself to be no more than the equal of a plain American journalist like you and me. It does him honour, Sims.’

‘Some people are partial to headaches. Can’t say I’m one. Wire?’

‘Some people are partial, *and* prejudiced, and—and—jealous,’ said Mr. Crowder. ‘That’s so. I’ll wire myself, Sims.’

‘Jealous?’ asked Mr. Sims, with a sudden hot look in his eyes.

‘That is so,’ said Mr. Crowder sadly. ‘That is a painful fact, Sims. Some people are.’

‘And some people drink champagne, and receive visits from females, and smoke tobacco; and some people are as fit to represent the “Argus” as—as—you,’ said Mr. Sims.

‘I would like to see that man,’ said Mr. Crowder, his voice beginning to rise at

last, ‘ who is as fit to represent the “ Argus ” as —as—I. I should have a very decided opinion concerning the existence of that man. As to females, and spirits, and tobacco, I trample on the words. Perhaps you will proceed with your occupation, which is not that of slander, *Mr. Sims.*’

‘ No, nor of jealousy, *Mr. Crowder.* I would as soon be jealous of some people as —’ His failure to find a simile gave his chief the triumph of the last word. But his having come off only second best in this terrible quarrel only made him feel the more keenly that there was at least one person better qualified to represent the ‘ Argus ’ than *Mr. Crowder.* He felt he could not approve of permitting the great organ of Spraggville to become the tool of a Lord Ovoca and a Gideon Skull. His duty might become unpleasant, but it must be done.

‘ It must have seemed very strange to you,’ said Gideon to Helen, ‘ all that talk in the office. Business, to an outsider, must seem a curious thing.’

‘It did not seem strange to me at all,’ said Helen. ‘I was not listening, and what words I heard meant nothing to me. You asked me to see you. What have you to say?’

‘It is difficult talking in the crowd of the street. We had better walk this way; it will take us along the river, and be all on your way home. . . . Well, I have not been idle; I have been to Hillswick.’

‘So you told me yesterday. I am sorry if you have been taking real trouble for Alan, though, of course, I must thank you. What have you learned that I need know, if I do not even yet know all?’

‘Miss Reid, I will not be thanked by you. All that I do is—you know what I told you three days ago. You will not thank me when you hear that I have—failed.’

‘Failed? In what had you to fail?’

‘I have the worst news for you . . . your father left no will.’

For the first time in this story Gideon Skull told a lie—a direct, downright lie. Clearly his association with Helen was cor-

rupting his honesty. But she had already felt all the guilt for both : mere imitation did not prove hard.

‘ Well ? ’ asked Helen.

‘ Do you mean to say you have forgotten what that means ? ’

‘ What *have* you found, then ? ’

‘ Is it not more than enough to have found ? The worst of all ? ’

‘ I knew that there was no will. What else does our whole life mean ? I don’t understand. You ask to see me—only to tell me that you have nothing to tell—nothing to say ? How could a visit to Hillswick make clearer to you what all the world knew before ? ’

‘ I told you,’ said Gideon humbly and patiently, ‘ that I would come back to you within three days and let you know how much hope I had found. I did hope—sanguinely, even. I could not believe that there could be really no will. It seemed impossible. Well, since you needed no convincing, I need tell you nothing of the chains of argument which, at Hillswick, led me to

the same conclusion. Rational men don't hide wills away in corners ; the lawyers are sure to know of them, even if they don't have them in their own hands, and Waldron had no opportunity of finding one and putting it in the fire. No ; there is no will.'

' This is all you asked to see me for ? ' asked Helen, feeling almost disappointed, though she had expected nothing. It was hard that she should have had to pass through so much shame for no end. But she was by no means looking downward, and a glimpse of his grave and down-turned face, in which she could read nothing but the shame of a strong man who has boasted of his will and strength beforehand and has found them impotent, made her feel guilty of ingratitude.

' Well, I *do* thank you,' she said, ' for all you hoped and tried to do for Alan. I am glad—in a way—that you are convinced there is nothing for any—outside—friend to do. You *do* know that nobody thinks *you* to blame . . . and if you had been . . . you have tried every way to undo it all. It is no

one's fault that there is no way. If we do not happen to meet again——'

'Not meet again?' he asked, really startled; for it was the last point at which he had been aiming, and the words, though he would have known how to take them at their worth from all such women as he had known, seemed to mean something when spoken by Helen Reid. It was not the first time during these last days that his heart had been startling him. It was a heavy, cumbrous muscle, Gideon Skull's heart, and its struggles into life were as hard as those of most hearts never are but when they are dying. But it was a heart, after all, and he was a man. He came near even to self-deception, to feeling as if he were dealing truly and openly with her, and to pitying, in a hungry sort of way, the pain he supposed his tidings were giving her. He could hardly resist the temptation of believing them himself, though they were lies. Love must needs take its one form, and it will somehow manage to wear that one form and no other. 'Not meet again?' he repeated: 'but we most surely shall. Have you for-

gotten what you told me you are living for—to get back Copleston for your brother, and that by any means? *You* are not one to take up a life's purpose in one moment and drop it in the next, if I know you at all.'

'I don't see how you can know me at all.'

'Perhaps you don't see it; but I do. You made a resolve when you believed there was no will. You are not likely to drop it because you now know there is no will. Belief and knowledge are practically much the same thing, I suppose; and that means—you will need me. It is idle to talk of our not meeting again. You have a brother, and I have—well, an enemy. Our motives are different, but our end is the same. We both mean that, in one way or another, Victor Waldron is not to keep Copleston.'

One must not shut one's eyes to human nature out of any tenderness for Helen—if such a thing still lingers. One cannot help remembering that she was walking by the side of the one man she had yet seen who made her feel that he was strong and resolute, and that he had a will, and that his will meant

something. She could not know how little strength, will, and resolution had hitherto meant with him, though she was right enough in her instinct that he had them all ; and, more right than even instinct could tell her in fee ing that, if he had never had them before, he had them now. She was inspiring a knight—for so common a thing there is no need that the lady should be the *beau idéal* of her sex, or the knight a Bayard. He may even be a strug-
gling adventurer, preying upon the refuse and garbage of the world's great doings, like Gideon, and she may be no better or nobler than Helen Reid. It may be that the brigand, or even the pickpocket, draws as much inspi-
ration of strength or address from the eyes or voice of his mistress as the knight-errant from those of his lady—and of the same kind, though to a somewhat different end. And surely the woman does not live who does not know when and whom she inspires, and who, when she knows it, can avoid a little pride. She may feel a little frightened also, but in that case she feels yet more proud. Helen had been too much used all her life to seeing

broad shoulders and strong arms to think anything about them, or to take them as the outward and visible signs of anything beyond themselves. But she felt there was that about Gideon's build which made it the sign of something to which she had not been accustomed, either in her father or in Alan. It was much more than that he by no means fulfilled her ideas of a gentleman. She had no objection to him on that score. The circumstances of her own birth prevented that sort of pride ; and then she had taken Waldron for a gentleman—so huge a mistake, that she might be equally mistaken in taking Gideon Skull for none.

‘ Yes,’ she answered him absently. ‘ But we have different ends—and different ways. You can have no hand in anything I may find to do ; and I, heaven knows ! can be of less use to you than you can be to me. Mr. Waldron does happen to be my enemy. But he is too mean for hating. Why do you hate him ? ’

‘ You do hate him, Miss Reid. A girl like you does not hate or love by halves. You hate him with all your soul. And I—you ask

me why I hate him? Who does not hate hypocrites, and scoundrels, and liars? I can't content myself with looking down on snakes. They are more dangerous than tigers We are something more than allies, Miss Reid, you and I. You mean work, and I mean work too. We must not be in the dark about one another. Two people looking for the same thing in the dark are apt to jostle, and to spoil everything. That must not be. At present, I own myself at sea, without a plan. I am thrown out by the want of that will. But you have one, and I have a right to help you.'

Helen certainly began to be a little afraid of the honest tradesman whom she had believed herself able to twist round her little finger. He was taking ells without having been allowed inches, and now he was claiming them as his due. She by no means wanted an ally who would claim a right to her confidence, would compel her to speak out what she was not reconciled to feeling, and probably end by sliding into the place of director and master.

'I have no plan,' said she.

‘No?’

‘No. And if I had—it should be my own. If I wanted help——’

‘You would come to me. Miss Reid—you distrust me. Why?’

‘Indeed I do nothing of the kind. There—we have said all that has to be said, and done all that can be done. Thank you for all your trouble and all your goodwill. This is my way home, I think. Good-bye.’

‘No; it is not your way home yet. Yours is still several turnings farther on. Do you suppose for one instant that I think you are giving up Copleston? And do you think I can stand by and see a girl like you, who knows nothing of the world—thank God!—preparing to get aground on all sorts of quick-sands and run her head against all sorts of stone walls? I don’t guess what you mean to do, for I’ll own you’re likely to be ten times cleverer in laying plans than I am. But laying plans is one thing, and carrying them out is another. You *must* have a man’s counsel. And since your brother is gone, there is nobody to give it you but me.’

Helen might have smiled at the idea of any man's thinking he could help her in carrying out her half-made scheme. But he had brought her face to face with it, and she could not smile. Though she felt what it was well enough, there is probably no reader of her story who could not put it into words better than she. It was to fascinate the enemy, obtain, by craft or surprise, the secret of his fraud, and then save herself—if she could—from selling herself for Alan. Of course, if she failed she must fail; but no absolutely last resource ever looks desperate: hope must hang to something, and if there be nothing left but a straw, then to a straw as completely as if the straw were a barge. How could she breathe a whisper of such a scheme even to a dearest friend who shared her inmost wishes with her? She knew well enough what she would have called any other girl who should make any such confession—outrageously vain would have been her lightest word. And she had been asked, nay, ordered to make her confession to Gideon Skull!

‘I hate Waldron much,’ he said, ‘but I

should hate myself ten thousand times more if I let you do yourself any harm. If it were any girl, I should feel very much the same,' added the Quixote-scorner, without being in the least troubled by his want of consistency. It did not even strike him that the sentiment was not original or entirely his own ; and one feels wonderfully honest and generous while one is saying generous things. He did not wish to see Helen Reid become quite of his world—he only wanted to find her sufficiently of it to be reasonably within reach of his arm. 'Promise me, when you find yourself in any trouble, to trust to me. Forget, if you like, how much I am with you in heart ; remember only that I am your brother's friend. Whenever you want help, send a line to me at the "Argus," and I will never fail you—be quite sure. Whenever I have anything to say, I shall let you know it.'

'There must be an end of this,' thought Helen, wishing she had left herself any right to be angry at the suggestion of a secret correspondence with Gideon Skull. 'We shall be leaving London in a few days,' said she.

‘Don’t think I don’t trust you, but our ways do not run together, and——’

‘You are going to leave London?’

‘Yes, now that my brother is gone. We shall most likely be staying with our friends the Meyricks——’

‘The Meyricks, of Thorp End——? Within a drive of Copleston?’

She had spoken of her intended visit as her best open reason for leaving town, so that she might leave Gideon no room for further questioning. Nor did he question her further. He only fell into silent rumination over what she could possibly be intending to do. ‘If she’s been getting any notions of that will on her own account,’ he thought, ‘and if she’s going down there to pump Uncle Christopher —’ The idea led to nothing in particular, and he thought again. Her going to stay with her friends might mean nothing, but then it might mean a great deal. Gideon was beginning to feel a martyr to mystery. He had got to the bottom of his uncle’s, only to be plunged into a new one by Helen. Perhaps it was nothing. But while he thought, his eyes

found their inevitable way to Helen's face, and he could not reconcile with a single possible view of human nature the idea of a girl like her—keen, eager, and thorough-going beyond reason, as he knew, passionate in her depths he was sure, scorning laws that opposed her and hating all who wronged her, with a great estate as a prize to be fought for—of a girl like this letting herself be tossed about among her acquaintances without any sort of plan.

However, he must be patient again. ‘Well,’ he said, ‘your visit in the country will be pleasanter than it might have been. You won’t be troubled by the neighbourhood of a scoundrel. . . . But if you have any notion of searching Copleston in the absence of its owner, you may spare yourself the pains. No will is to be found anywhere.’

‘What!’ exclaimed Helen. ‘Is not Mr. Waldron at Copleston?’

She was so obviously startled at his obvious piece of news that the most unreasonable of all unreasonable jealousy fell over him. He was so new in love that its phases were playing chaos in him. Ever since seeing Helen

he had been jealous of Waldron's admiration for her, and even that long talk in the church-yard had been rankling. The feeling was absolutely and preposterously without reason, but in his hungry way he hated to think that she and Waldron should even have quarrelled eye to eye. A man who comes to be quarrelled with may come too near ; he wished to think of Helen as shut up in her present poverty and helplessness, without a friend but himself, or even a visible enemy in the shape of a man, and that man Victor Waldron. For, with all the duller part of his nature—but not altogether without experience—he held that hate and love are next-door neighbours, and, yet more dully, that all girls prefer fops to men. He despised Waldron for his foppish affectations, which is the same thing as saying that he envied them. Helen's startled question made him savage. Simple indifference is the most satisfactory feeling on the part of the woman one loves towards one's enemy : hate is a great deal too warm.

‘No,’ said Gideon, ‘he is not at Copleston.

He has never been there since you left it, and

most likely never will be. He is in his own country for ought I know, spending Copleston in New York or Spraggville ; or, being an American, and Paris being shut up, he's more likely in Rome. All the Yankees have got a craze that Rome isn't a suburb of Spraggville. If you want to meet Victor Waldron, Miss Reid, I think you'd better visit somebody in Rome—if you can stand the way in which all the inhabitants twang English through the nose, and sculpt, and talk of the Eye-talians.'

Gideon had to let out his growing wrath, and Victor Waldron's fellow-countrymen were the first objects at hand. He had brought a good many British prejudices home with him —at least as many as he had carried out—and had never been in Rome. The piece of petulance was not meant for Helen, though it wrapped up a point that was meant for her. But she did not notice even the apparently imbecile suggestion that she, Helen Reid, wished to meet Victor Waldron at Copleston, and was going into its neighbourhood for that impossible end—a suggestion as imbecile as it was right, and an end as impossible as it was true.

Down went her house of cards—queen, knave, and all.

It had been a very flimsy house, even for one of cards. But she had built it for strength, and had thought it strong, so the blow was as great as if it had been built of marble and iron. Never had she felt till now that her helplessness was utter and absolute—only equalled by the passion of desire to do anything and all things for Alan. She was too paralysed even to sigh, as one does at the downfall of a common dream. To will wrong without the power to do wrong—what on the face of the whole earth is half so bitter and so hard?

‘What *can* I do?’ she almost cried out, forgetting where she was, who was with her, and what her cry of weakness might mean.

Gideon smiled—that smile which had gone far to make Waldron his friend, and was the best part of him. He had not been clever enough to find out her intended plan of action, but his honest bit of anger had served him as well as instinct in defeating her plan. She would not talk of leaving London any more, he was sure. ‘What can you do? Trust, dear

Miss Helen. That is the first great thing. For one thing—you may trust me. Perhaps you have not yet learned the power of money in this world. It can't do everything, but it can buy secrets, and fight the law, and recover rights when nothing else can. I have been poor and rich, and I know what both the things mean. No—*you* cannot fight Victor Waldron, but I can, and I will. People call me rich now. But nobody—not even I myself—knows how rich I shall be in a few weeks from now. I'm the last man to boast of such things. You are the first man, woman, or child who has heard me speak in this way. I tell you that you may know what you are trusting, as well as whom. Dear Miss Helen, it is only too true that there is no will, and that you and your brother have no rights at law. But as long as Gideon Skull has even a poor ten thousand a year, neither you nor he is poor. Be brave, and trust, even if Copleston must go. Here is your turning at last,' he said with a sigh. 'Good-bye—for now.'

'Good-bye,' said Helen coldly—not with intention, but because her heart felt cold.

Everything was lost and gone, except Gideon Skull. She went home, and despaired. Her scheme looked very ugly now that it had become impossible. But she felt, in herself, that its impossibility was no merit of hers, and that the wrong of a thing is complete when the thing is planned. Yes, it is hard to wish what one hates oneself for having wished, and to feel at the same time that the self-contempt comes from having failed. It disposes one to resolve never to fail again. As for the self-contempt, that cannot be felt twice over. What could Helen do for her brother now?

Gideon, having bid for Helen the ten thousand a year at least which he was going to have in full time to make his statement perfectly true, returned to the ‘Argus.’ He felt he was not making a fool of himself in bidding even twenty thousand a year for this girl, seeing that he knew all about the will. If it did not end in making him master of Copleston, it would ensure the ruin of Victor Waldron, and bring him a good dowry with his wife and a considerable amount of prize-money from his brother-in-law. Well, perhaps

not that, seeing that gratitude was not to be looked for from the high-minded and unworldly type of young man. But the rest was secure, and probably a great deal more. And yet, in spite of all things, he was thinking of Helen herself much more than of Copleston.

‘Crowder,’ he said, when he reached the office again, ‘Miss Reid tells me she is leaving town. You’ll give me all private letters from her brother, and I’ll forward them to wherever she may be. That’s all .Remember Saturday.’

‘I will !’ said Mr. Crowder, sending a look of defiance across the table to Mr. Sims.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Luke.—A fig for all such baubles, and the fools
Who waste their wits, and fog their arid skulls
To learn that force is force and weight is weight,
And that on nothing not a straw can stand !
Give me one pinch of dust, and I will move
The elemental world, the solar sphere,
Cycle and epicycle, planet, star,
All earth and anti-earth, without the aid
Of wheel, or block, or bar, or slant, or spire—
All that the Syracusan dreamed I'll do
Without a fulcrum—so the dust be gold.

SURE enough, when Helen went indoors again she found upon the mantelpiece a letter from Bertha. There was no need to open it in order to know that it contained a pressing invitation to her and her mother to make a long stay at Thorp End. Without such an invitation the letter would not have been from Bertha. Helen did not take the trouble to open the letter immediately. What did anything signify? The whole future looked too hideous for facing. Alan, at barely more than five-and-twenty, was to accept as his destiny a life

of heartless plodding for daily bread—what would he become? She, at less than five-and-twenty, was to accept as hers—nothing; and to accept this no-life after having set herself to do all things for Alan. She had been robbed of all that she had made up her mind to live for, and nothing was left but the barrenness of waiting for what she knew nothing of, save that it was something which could never come to her. Waiting to turn into a man, perhaps—that would be the best thing, and by no means the most impossible. In what spirit can a girl, in her first womanhood, tell herself consciously that such a life as this must be hers?

If she have one least touch of nature in common with Helen Reid, she will have but one answer to give herself. She will flatly refuse. There was as much desire for the fulness of life in her as if she had not devoted her life to her brother's, and far more than if she had not been torn out of her natural world. In leaving Helen out of it, Mrs. Reid had neglected to take into account a very considerable element in her scheme for Alan.

Fortunately — or unfortunately — her mother was not in their parlour when she came in, so she had time to think quietly, as well as to feel the whole need for thinking. She was by no means blind to the very plainly written cause of Gideon's energy and devotion — he had taken care to print it clearly and largely enough in looks, movements, tones, in everything but mere words, which in themselves count for nothing in such cases. For that matter, it was these unspoken speeches of Gideon which had given rise to her barren idea of using what he had taught her against the usurper of Copleston. At any rate, she was driven to think a great deal of Gideon Skull—almost as much as he could have desired, though not altogether in the way that he would have chosen. She felt no instinctive liking for the man. Women are not much better or more exacting judges of the points which go to make up a gentleman than men are of the attributes of ladies ; but she could not help feeling that if to be a gentleman means to be like her father and her brother, then Gideon Skull could not be one. He was

coarse both in his choice and in his use of words, and absolutely without the faintest flavour of courtesy. But then, on the other hand, he was the most perfect of gentlemen, if to be a gentleman means to be unlike Victor Waldron. And, after all, is not outward coarseness and roughness one of the most famous notes of the diamond? What is polish but an accident? It was no fault of Gideon's that he had been hardened and roughened by a life spent in fighting single-handed against the world, and—winning. Yes, he had won in the battle of life; Helen was in a mood to look upon that as the greatest thing a man can do. If likeness of look comes from likeness of thought, there was every reason for the growth of the likeness between Helen and her mother.

And what, after all, mattered the birth or breeding of man or woman to a nameless nobody like her? Had she not been declaring war against the whole unjust world to which Victor Waldron belonged in order to make up for her father's cowardice and her brother's tame submission? Why, Gideon Skull, who had fought

and won, was a hero ; and was she to be so cowardly and so submissive as to throw away her power over such a man because his words lacked polish and his manner courtesy ?

He was strong, she felt ; but she was stronger than he, she knew. The only question worth thinking about was what she should do with him. Being himself part of her enemy, the world, his only use was to be used. How she could use wealth, however it might come to her, she knew very well. Her mother would be put above want, Alan's up-hill path to Bertha would be made straight and level, Copleston might be won back, and life for herself, though it could never again become beautiful, might be turned into a space in which some few wrongs might be righted and a little good might be done. She would not feel so wholly like an insect who has got caught in the wheels of a machine, and whose capacities for life and flight are being ground to pieces uselessly.

Yes, it would be terrible waste to let Gideon Skull slip out of her hand. The only question was how, and not whether, she should

use him. And that is a question which can hardly help answering itself, when it lies between a woman and a man. Victor Waldron was the shadow of a piece of flesh, the two birds in the bush, the half loaf, compared with Gideon.

She soon, however, had enough of straightforward thinking about such things. It is best to let them drift, and spare one the discomfort of any avoidable loss of self-respect by settling themselves. She opened Bertha's letter, but only took the most languid interest in what her dearest friend had to say to her. There was nothing in it beyond what she had expected, and yet it seemed to her as if it had been written to quite another Helen Reid than the Helen into whose hands it had come, even than the Helen whom it was answering.

‘Dearest Nelly,’ she read,—‘As if I wasn’t glad and thankful to hear from you; as if I had not been wondering what had become of you, and not been afraid to hear! Why didn’t you write months and months ago? If I didn’t know you, I should have

thought you were something more than unkind ; but what is the use of friendship if I can't go on trusting through silence even ? I do know you, you see ; and though *I* don't see why you should not have written to me, I am sure that *you* know why, and that your reason has been some wild, extravagant, generous, heroic, absurd, incomprehensible, true-hearted reason—just like you. I'm sure I should love you for it, even though I can't understand, and though I mean never to forgive you for it as long as I don't see you. I wish, dearest Nelly, I had the wit for understanding as well as for trusting. Yes, it did seem to me almost past believing that you—all of you—even you, Nelly, went away without a good-bye, or a word instead of one. I hardly know how to tell you what it made me think. It seemed as if you were too proud to have anything more to do with anybody who knew you before that dreadful time. Only such a thing as that *could* not be between me and you. I'm glad, with all my heart and soul, to hear it wasn't that—at least with *you*. As if I haven't been thinking more kindly of

you than ever ; as if, if I had thought any other way, I should have cared ! Then it is true that you have lost everything ? I had heard so ; but I had been hoping against hope, and nobody seemed to know anything for certain, except that in some strange way Copleston did not belong to you. Nobody seems to know quite why you had to give it up without a trial ; but everybody is *sure* that whatever you did was just and right, and worthy of your father, who was loved and honoured, and is still, in a way that would make you too proud to be proud of anything else under the sun. I wish you could hear how *mine* speaks of *yours*. Come and hear it, Nelly. Papa has told me, without a hint or a word from me, to tell you and Mrs. Reid to come to Thorp End and stay here all the time your brother is away—and longer, if you will. You can't want to be by yourselves in London all alone ; and it is enough to break my heart when you talk in that way of not being able to do anything you want to. You can do everything you *need* do, and that is to get into a train and come to Thorpe End. I do want you, Nell.

There is nobody I care to see since you left ; and as for talking, I have not done such a thing since last Easter Eve. And I think you want to talk and to be talked to as much as I, and more. Your letter tells me that, Nelly. Your letter reads as if all sorts of things had been gathering in your heart and turning bitter ; and that will *not* do. Shall I be such a baby as to pretend I don't understand you about Alan ? I thought of being one ; but no, I don't think I will. I'll be old and grown up enough to tell you this : that if you had never written me one word about him, I should have *known* what you tell me—that he did whatever he thought was best for others. I wish people would not be so *un-selfish*, Nelly. He never said a word to me more than any old friend might who had almost grown up with one. I suppose I have no right to mix up what might have been with what might not have been. But *if*— You don't think I should have said “Yes” on Easter Eve, and “No” on Easter Day ! He did not care enough to try me—that's all. And why should he ? I never supposed he did ; and I assure you, with all my

heart, that I don't feel one atom the less his friend than ever because he did not happen to ask me to marry him. It would be rather hard on a man if there was to be nothing between not caring for a girl at all and wanting to spend his whole life in her company. I want a great many people, men and women, to care for me very much ; but I couldn't marry them all, and I don't mean or want to marry one of them. No, Nelly, not even Mr. Victor Waldron. I think of your brother *as always*, even though he might have come to say good-bye to an old playfellow without being afraid of her saying anything to him but “God bless you !”—as she does now.

‘It was you made me think of Mr. Victor Waldron ; for, so far from knowing him, I have never even set eyes on him. I believe he is known very well at the “George” at Hillswick, and that he made a bosom friend of old Grimes, the sexton ; but he has never made or received a call from any real people, and the last news of him is that he has gone back to America. And as to Copleston, indeed, Nelly, I have never had the heart to go in

sight of the lodge gate, and have always ridden other ways. And so—I have no news. For it isn't news, is it, that I want you? You *will* come, and you will give my dearest love to Mrs. Reid; and if you are a better letter-writer to your brother than you are to your sister, tell him that his sister Bertha thinks just as kindly of him as his sister Helen. Say “Yes” by return of post, and come by the next train.

‘Your loving
‘BERTHA.’

When she had finished the letter, Helen felt that even Bertha herself was a little changed. These airs of wisdom and resignation and dignity looked much more like the scar of a wound than the signs of having been left heart-whole. ‘Thank God for that!’ sighed Helen. ‘*He* is not breaking his heart and spoiling his life for nothing. Yes, she *does* love him, and *will* wait for him, if I can only use the time!’ She read the letter again, this time between the lines, and found proof enough that the invitation to Thorp End was

fully as much for Alan's sister as for Bertha's friend ; and she was pleased with a hundred tokens of what Bertha, who had never been asked for her ‘Yes,’ was too shy to put into plain words. Well, that would soon all come out in talk ; but—— ‘What am I thinking?’ Helen suddenly remembered. ‘What can I do for them at Thorp End? My work must be here.’

Helen Reid might work for a century without pushing on Alan’s fortunes so far as to make it consistent with his notions of honour to ask an heiress to share them with him. Left to himself, Alan, altogether desperate and heart-broken as she took him to be, might work to the same end for a thousand years. But what might not be done, and done quickly, by Mrs. Gideon Skull?

When the saving sense of humour is dead, the meanly grotesque will take its room. ‘Mrs. Gideon Skull!’ The name helped the man by becoming the worst part of him. Nothing could possibly be worse about him than his name, which had been identified all her life with his Uncle Christopher. She did

not imagine for an instant that Alan would approve of the means she took to raise the fortunes of the Reids. But she was her own mistress ; she had a right to make her own choice, and a poor man who loved a rich girl could have no stones to throw at a girl who chose to fall in love—yes, she must make up her mind to fall in love—with a rich man. He might not approve her taste : brothers are not bound to admire their brothers-in-law : but they must accept them, and, when their brothers help them to the desire of their own hearts, they will accept them. After all, beyond his name and his style of talk, no fair objection could possibly be taken to Gideon. He was a man ; and in point of manhood and money, earls' daughters have been known to make worse matches with the approval of the world. It was by marriage that Copleston had come to the Reids in the beginning. And Alan and Helen were not even Reids—the Skulls were of a higher caste than the son and daughter of nobody. ‘Can I manage to really care about him?’ asked Helen. ‘It will make things so far and far easier if I only can—a

little. I suppose I can if I try,' thought she who had once said 'I would be Queen Cophetua,' and was now scheming how best and soonest to catch Gideon Skull because of his ten thousand a year.

There was no need to keep Bertha's letter. That had been written to Queen Cophetua. She tore it up and threw it into the fire—burning her ships behind her.

CHAPTER XIX.

You have pity for the sparrow
When the cloud lies white and deep,
When the day is dark and narrow,
And the world's afraid to sleep,
Fearing frost for heart and marrow,
Hoarding all the life we keep ?

Pity not the slave of Nature,
Though the cold hath numbed his tongue :
Frost may come with kinder feature
Than your linnet finds in song—
Pity thou the cagèd creature,
Longing when the days are long !

MRS. REID was not yet at the end of the means she had reserved to herself in order to begin the battle. She also had burned her ships, or at least cut herself away from them for seven years ; for to play at poverty and not to throw the whole burden of battle upon Alan's shoulders in the fullest and sternest reality would have been the merest child's play. She would not expose herself to the temptation of secretly helping him out of some

hard strait, as she might prove weak enough to do if she had kept her communications with her sources of supply open; and the point and glory of her triumph was to be his coming triumphantly out of a struggle as real as if he had been born to poverty. She never dreamed that the means she had kept for starting would run out before even the first sign or promise of success, nor did she think so now; for that matter, she did not allow herself to think so. Such a thought would mean fear of failure, and that was to be impossible. This barren, boyish folly of running off to see the soldiers and hear the drums drove her to a stricter economy, if that could be possible. But there was no reason to fear that things would not hold out until he returned, and then the poorer he found them the better.

She had locked up in her desk the advance of Alan's wages from the '*Argus*'; but these were not to be touched, whatever might happen, until they should be repaid with interest at the end of the seven years. Alan, she knew well enough, would never ask a

word about them, and, apart from her plan, she would have been ashamed—she, who had been born a Hoël of Pontargraig, and had married scarcely, if at all, beneath her—to live on the wages that a newspaper paid a reporter. Her one idea of giving and taking hard blows in the battle of life, and of elbowing and fighting one's way through the crush, was to come, see, and conquer : her notion of ladder-climbing was to make a clear spring over the lower half of the rungs. She had occasion to open her desk when the postman brought Bertha's letter, so that she happened to be out of the way when it arrived, and was undisturbed by the sight of the Hillswick postmark. Indeed, she was too deeply absorbed in her accounts to hear the knock at the door, or she might have hurried down in the hope of another letter from Alan. The time had long gone by for finding any excitement in such reckonings of petty cash for a great purpose, while feeling all the while that nothing but her will prevented each sovereign she dealt with from turning into at least a hundred a year.

But the more she reckoned, the harder

became the meeting of both ends. It seemed as if the situation would become something more than serious for want of a number of pounds so few that she might, if she pleased, treat them as of no more account than shillings. It had certainly never occurred to her that she and Helen might have to face the very hardest realities of the battle, such as women alone can feel. She looked at the notes she had received for Alan. If she used them as a loan, they could still be repaid when the time came, and she would be spared the complication of her scheme by the meanest and most sordid of details. Perhaps the time might come when the use of these bank-notes would become what most people would call an inevitable necessity, and when she would, as a matter of course, have to go to her desk on finding her purse empty. And that must not be allowed to happen. She could not disapprove of the source and use what came therefrom.

So, while her purse was not as yet wholly empty, and while to-morrow with its needs was still that to-morrow which is always so

far away, she made the notes up into a packet in order to place them where, should she ever come to need them, she would be unable to obtain them without a conscious and deliberate suppression of pride—that is to say, where they would be as safe from her as if she had spent them. An account in Lombard Street was still lingering in her name, unknown to her son or daughter, and by adding these notes to it she would put them beyond the reach of any chance mood of weakness such as the extremity of some day's pressure might bring upon her. Without seeing whether Helen had returned from her errands, she carried her notes eastward as if her spirit had been a miser's, so afraid of spending that it would not trust the strength of its own hands. Avarice itself could not have done more than pride.

She paid in Alan's notes over the bank counter and turned homewards, with her mind relieved of the fear of a burden. She had nearly reached her own street when she saw before her her daughter Helen, walking by the side of Gideon Skull.

Inconceivable as that bare fact was, it was not all. They were walking slowly, and in earnest talk, and his head was turned and his face bent down towards hers. It might have been a chance meeting—it must have been. How could it be anything else, when their whole acquaintance was confined to a single interview? And yet Mrs. Reid's heart sank and trembled as it remembered all at once a hundred nothings—a hundred noughts which, nothing in themselves, became signs of power by grouping themselves after the fact which she saw with her own eyes. Helen was not one towards whom a mother, with a great secret to keep of her own, could find distrust impossible. For all these last months they had for the first time been such close and constant companions as to find out, each for herself, that the other's real life was one in which she had no share, and that a wall stood between them of a nature beyond guessing. Helen thought her mother hardened and weighed down by the sense of a marriage that had been no marriage, by pride that forbade her to share shame, and by its cruel con-

sequences to her son. Mrs. Reid thought her daughter crushed by adversity like a coward, so that she felt her not worth consideration or confidence in her plans for Alan. But that was a very different thing from finding her almost arm in arm with Gideon Skull, as if she had been some Hillswick shop-girl who had crept out of the house on a false pretence to meet a lover—a lover whom many a Hillswick shop-girl had crept out to meet, if all old tales were true.

For what had Gideon called upon them at all? Why had he been so incomprehensibly and unreasonably friendly towards Alan? Men like Gideon, so much even Mrs. Reid knew, do not go among the fallen to pick up friends, or waste their good offices upon those who can do nothing in return. Why had he called a second time within two days? Why had her presence confused his looks and his words, and driven him out of the house as if he were afraid of an elderly woman and a girl? In what way but one was she to read the speech of his eyes during his visit; and what could have been the meaning of Helen's

changes of colour and unnatural silence in his presence; and her feeble excuses for him when his back was turned? It did not seem impossible to her that a girl should be led astray by Gideon. She herself did more than justice to his pluck, his strength, and his triumph in the battle of life, which had gone far to inspire her with her scheme for Alan. She did not underrate his old character with respect to women; he had been, ever since her marriage, her sole living type of the great, bold, bad man, whom she feared far too much to despise; and she had a sort of lingering mistrust that she had done wrong to warn Helen against him on so dangerous and fascinating a ground. Gentleman or not, how could Mrs. Reid tell what arts and forces he might not have wherewith to subdue girls? Women know better than to think that ladies, though their own daughters, are made of different flesh or blood from the rank and file of Hills-wick or of anywhere. She would sooner have seen Helen walking with a lion than with Gideon Skull. No wonder her heart sank and grew cold. Such meetings as this are never

accidents, however they may happen ; and the mere thought or dream of Helen—Helen, out of all the world—being in the streets with Gideon Skull ! It must be true, because it could never have entered her head to dream.

She would have given anything for the power to go near enough to them to catch one least word. She could only keep them in sight : and she noticed they remained together, as if unwilling to part, till Helen reached the last turning that would lead her home. Why did not Gideon see her to her door, not a hundred steps away ? And he held her hand for a whole half-second longer than there was need.

She waited till Helen was well indoors before following her, and the time she gave herself for her suspicions to cool in gave them ample time to grow and to combine themselves. She went indoors, and found Helen, still in her hat and cloak, throwing scraps of paper into the fire. It was a strange occupation ; at least, all that was in her mother's heart made it strange.

Still, it might have been nothing but an

accident, after all. Even in London people may fall across one another without intention ; and it was one thing to doubt her own daughter with her eyes and another with her heart. Helen could not surely have waited till she was a woman to begin secret-keeping. So her mother said nothing beyond some common word in order that Helen might herself tell her, without asking, of this chance meeting, for such it must really have been after all ; though hardly even by chance could it have happened at Copleston.

But Helen only answered with the commonest of words. None but the very commonest had passed for a long time between these two.

‘ You have had a letter ? ’ asked Mrs. Reid, looking at the last scrap of paper as it fluttered up the chimney.

‘ Yes, a line from Bertha. There was nothing in it, only her own affairs, and to ask about us, and—that’s all.’

‘ From Bertha Meyrick ? How did she find out where we were ? ’ asked Mrs. Reid, wishing that Helen had not been the last to

mention the letter, but not really wondering at so simple a thing as a letter from a girl to a girl which mothers might not be meant to read. ‘From Mr. Skull, I suppose. I thought for a minute it might have been from Alan.’

‘They seem all very well, and Bertha sends her love to you. I didn’t know you were going out, mamma.’

‘And I didn’t know you were, or I should have asked you to do an errand or two—or we could have gone together. Have you been back long?’

Helen noticed no anxiety in her mother’s voice, which, indeed, never told anything. It was far too well preserved to have known the wear and tear of the voices of those whose hearts and tongues are tied together.

‘Only a minute or two. I wonder what Alan is doing now?’

‘I don’t much like the idea of your going out all by yourself, Helen. London isn’t Copleston.’

‘Why, what could happen to me?’

‘That’s just what I mean—you don’t know; but we all know that things do

happen. Of course, if you were not alone, it would be a different thing.'

'Mamma, do you mean that I ought to sit indoors and wait till Alan comes home again?'

She should have said 'But I was not alone,' thought Mrs. Reid. 'Then, you met nobody—nothing happened to you?'

'What a startling question, mamma!' said Helen. 'Whom should I meet? What should have happened to me?'

'One gets ideas, Helen. I don't know London, and I suppose I never shall. . . . One hears all sorts of nonsense, you know, and fancies more. No, of course, there's nobody you were likely to meet, nor anything likely to happen. No doubt you're thinking me the very stupidest of old ladies to be nervous about your going out by yourself. I suppose I shall get used to it in time. Well, nothing happened, and you met nobody. That's what most such fancies and presentiments come to, I suppose.'

A real destiny seemed driving Helen. First, she had conquered herself so far as to lay siege to Copleston in the person of its

usurper. Victor Waldron's absence had sent that to the winds. Then, not to be defeated, she had brought herself to forge a golden fulcrum out of Gideon Skull ; and was that also to be defeated by a needless answer to a meaningless fancy ? For she knew well enough what her mother thought about Gideon, and how gradual and imperceptible conquest of such a prejudice must be ; certainly not by saying, ‘ Yes ; I met him because I went out to meet him,’ and then having to find an answer to a ‘ Why?’ Still less by saying, ‘ Yes, by accident, Gideon Skull.’ If she strained at a whole downright lie, it was not likely she would be able to swallow such a far worse-tasting and meaner-natured thing as half a one. Perhaps she felt that a girl who is scheming that most monstrous of all lies to which people swear when they marry one another for love of money had no right to avoid one which is a mere means to an end, and which at any rate has the merit of keeping peace and sparing pain. Perhaps, in a deeper way, her mother's having a secret made it the easier for her to say—

‘No, I met nobody, and nothing happened to me.’

It was Helen’s first untruth, and she was surprised, even then, at the easy and matter-of-course way in which it came to her. She spoke it without a stumble, and felt sure that she turned neither red nor pale. Her heart, started by Gideon, must have been rolling down hill faster than she had fancied. But she did not look her mother in the eyes, and therefore did not see in them what she might have seen.

Mrs. Reid was not one of those happy people who can disbelieve their own eyes and ears when they please. She did not think it more likely that her own senses should have deceived her than that Helen should deny having met Gideon Skull, even by chance, within a few minutes of parting with him. Such confidence as there had ever been between Mrs. Reid and her daughter had been long melting away into mere daily association, and what must it mean when a girl hides from her mother that she meets a man out of doors who has been forbidden in the

plainest possible terms to visit her at home? The untruth did not trouble Mrs. Reid so much as its cause. There are times, even Mrs. Reid knew, when the senses of the heart become confused, and when daughters think no more of deceiving their mothers than their mothers thought of deceiving their grandmothers before them. Nothing Helen could do or say could be of equal consequence with Alan's deeds and words. But how, in this little while, could matters have gone so far between Helen and this man that even her truth, which was her nature, should have become a slave to him? In this bare light it seemed incredible, and yet it was true. Gideon must be something a great deal more than a merely dangerous man. He must have acquired that mysterious power of fascination which makes women slaves, and a Gideon Skull the equal of even a Hoël. She had read and heard of such things, and now her own daughter had become a victim to it before her eyes. She saw no outward charm in Gideon. To her, at his last visit, he had looked like a man in love, but in the most

rude and awkward of fashions—the victim and not the victim-maker. But then fascination is by its nature a mystery of mysteries to all but the one whom it concerns. What was Mrs. Reid to do?

A pang did go through her when it was thus, for the first time, brought home to her that she and Helen were not all to one another that they should have been, and that her own reserve in outward affection and shyness in feeling might have led to their like in Helen. She could not charge Helen with deceit, upbraid her with it, and forbid her, in plainer terms than ever, to have anything to do with this man. That would be the wisdom of a fool. If Helen was really so far gone in her blind folly as to have secret meetings with Gideon and to tell untruths about them, she had certainly long passed the stage where simple obedience can be looked for, or where shame may be expected to undo what love had done. And, besides, Mrs. Reid had always instinctively avoided putting Helen's obedience to the proof even in little things ; they had always understood one another so little that

there had always been a sort of fear between them. Why, for aught she knew, a girl like Helen, under such influence as Gideon's had shown itself to be, would fly to open rebellion for what she thought love's sake when she found that secrecy would no longer serve her. For once, Mrs. Reid's shame and sorrow were infinitely too deep for the anger which alone could have made her do so foolish a thing as to drive Helen's womanhood into open revolt against her. And as for arguments and prayers, Helen had shown clearly enough how much she would care about such things as those. It was not so much Helen's fault, after all. It is not the sparrow's fault when it comes down from its height and its safety for the sake of the serpent's eyes ; nor, perhaps, is it even the serpent's—but it was most assuredly Gideon's. Helen must be saved by watchfulness ; force would be worse than folly. Meanwhile, there was one thing which could be done, and that instantly.

‘I have been going through our accounts this morning,’ she said in her quietest way. There was absolutely nothing left in her eyes

or her voice to tell Helen that she had lied vainly. ‘And I find—well, it comes to this—we cannot go on living as we are, or here while Alan is away.’

‘Do you mean we are spending too much—that we can possibly spend less than we do?’

‘I mean that, whether we can or cannot, we must, Helen.’

‘But what can we do? I spend nothing, and you *must* live in comfort. What would Alan say?’

‘Alan will say as you do, and I would not grudge any hardship on earth if it would serve him for a spur. I don’t mean we need live less well on the whole, but we must live a great deal less well if we do not live elsewhere. Alan took these lodgings for us before he could possibly tell what our means would be, and when he thought, no doubt, that money would drop upon us somehow from the skies; and I can understand that he did not like to bring you and me straight from Copleston into worse lodgings than these are. But it must be done, if we are to go on at all. It is not as if we

had an income that we might have to manage, but still that we could trust to.'

'Oh, mamma, I wish with all my heart there were no money in the world.'

'You are not the first to say that, Helen; and it is no use saying.'

'Then what must we do? I feel as if there were nothing useless in the world but me. I wish Alan were at home again. I cannot leave you now; but when he does come back, and you would not have to be left alone—'

Hope came back into Mrs. Reid's heart. If Gideon Skull had been asking Helen Reid to marry him, and if she, in some fit of madness, had stooped so far as to accept him, then her untruth had not been a lie, but simply the outcome of the shyness and confusion of a girl who has been planning to tell her wonderful story at her own time and in her own way, and has been suddenly thrown out by an unlooked-for question. If that were all, Mrs. Reid would know what to do exceedingly well—Gideon Skull, as an honest lover, would be very different to deal with than Gideon

Skull prowling about more characteristically after his prey.

‘Well, when Alan comes?’

‘You will let me do something for myself, mamma—and for him, and for us all. You will have *him* then, you know,’ said Helen with a little more jealousy in her emphasis than she knew, for she was beginning to feel terribly alone; so much alone that Gideon Skull’s friendship felt as worth buying as his strength and his gold—not because he was Gideon Skull, but because he was a man upon whom she could lean, and whom she might learn how to reward.

‘I don’t know what I can do—nothing well, I suppose—but sometimes people want companions, or people to look after growing girls without exactly teaching them, or—there *must* be things to be done. What do other girls do not to be burdens on their brothers, and not to be mere eating and sleeping machines?’

It was rather an after-thought, which came to her like most of her impulses—too suddenly to be thought over, and too strongly

and completely to be ever withdrawn. In her present mood it meant, as she supposed, freedom to work and plan, and from being unable to go out of doors for an hour without having to tell lies when she returned ; and, beyond even this, she was feeling such a mere prisoner upon a treadmill which ground nothing that, for its own sake, she was hungry for change and open air.

Whatever she may mean to think and to feel, what should come to a girl born and bred to all manner of happiness who finds herself, for no fault of hers, condemned to such a gaol as Helen Reid's, with no hope of love or joy for herself, feeling herself and all who belonged to her crushed under a dead load of injustice like the Titans under the mountains, and yet all this without having lost one memory of old freedom, or one capacity for happiness and joy ? Perhaps there are girls who do not know how to answer, and one hardly knows whether to say so much the worse or so much the better for them. But caged birds who were not born in cages know ; and what they know is that the songs

which they sing behind wires are not good songs.

Mrs. Reid's heart sank again, bitterly disappointed. So that was all—only a desire to leave home ; and what should be the meaning of such a desire but one thing ? A wish to go out to service, even were it an honest one, showed loss of pride enough to account for her stooping to fifty lies. It shocked her even more than the lie, and frightened her more than the want of confidence from which the lie had come.

'A companion—a nursemaid ! You !' she said, with the most sincere amazement and dismay. 'Alan's sister out at service—are you mad, Helen ?'

'Why not, mamma ? Alan has become a clerk—why should not I be a clerk's sister ?'

'Why not ? Because it is impossible. There is nothing that *you* can do except—being patient—not for long ; and being good, Helen, and *true*. What else should a woman be ? And what more should she want to be ? Is it not enough for her ? You want to help Alan—don't you know the way ?'

‘Should I not have been brought up to earn my own bread if—if I had not been born at Copleston?’

‘If one thing is different, all other things are different too. Oh, Helen, I do wish you thought less of what you want and more of others. Think of your father—think how he would feel, yes, and *will* feel, at seeing you, Helen, turned into a paid drudge; what he would think of me for permitting you; what he would think of Alan for not being man enough to keep you safely in your own place—for no woman can lose her right place, whatever can happen to her. And think of Alan—what would he say when he returns? Think of *his* shame. I don’t ask you to think of me, because I only think of Alan. But if there is one more way left for you to wound me, it would be your forcing me to let me see a girl with the blood of princes in her, *my* daughter, forgetting herself and her birth by —No. Never let me hear you speak of such a thing again.’

‘But—if Alan would think only for me, ought I not to think only of him?’

‘He would not think of you only. He would think of all that was due to his father, and to his name.’

‘His name !’ The word came so hotly into her heart that it slipped from her tongue before she could call it back again. ‘Oh, mamma,’ she said, ‘indeed I did not mean—but—’

‘Indeed I do not know what you mean,’ said Mrs. Reid. ‘I should have thought you would have known that by a man’s name one does not mean merely a number of letters which may spell anything, but all the highest that his own self can be to him—all the trusts that generations have laid upon him, and all that makes him differ from others, for good or ill.’ Helen wondered at her mother’s calmness, and was obliged to set it down to the apathy which comes from long endurance and increasing age. She did not seem even to notice that Helen’s slip of the tongue betrayed a knowledge of the family shame.

‘I mean,’ said Helen quickly, ‘you say a woman cannot lose her right place, whatever

happens ; there are ladies everywhere, doing all sorts of things.'

' I mean,' said her mother, ' that no woman can lose her right place if she remains true in thought and true in word. In that sense there *are* ladies everywhere.'

' And why should not I be as true in my words and my thoughts, even if I went behind a counter, as——' She could not say, ' as I am now.'

' As you are now?' asked her mother for her, sadly. ' Yes, you might be *that*, Helen But that is not the question now. I do not choose that you should do one least thing unbecoming Alan's sister—one least thing below that, from marriage down to doing badly what thousands can do well. We will go and look for other lodgings, cheaper ones, and go into them as soon as we can leave here. But there is no reason why, because we have to count shillings, we should lose pride. Before I married we were all poor at home, but *we* never forgot ourselves. And,' thought Mrs. Reid to herself, ' wherever we go, I shall not send our address to Gideon Skull.' She

did not add, ‘Nor will Helen.’ Weak as her daughter had shown herself, there was no need, even for an instant, to suppose her capable of carrying deliberate disobedience and concealment quite so far.

But why not? when, in doing one wrong thing, Helen felt that she had left no road open but that which led forward. What could be so mean as to let her own mother grow poorer and poorer, and leave Alan unaided, because she was afraid of helping them in spite of themselves? The greater was their pride, the less must be hers. She did not realise her own passionate hunger for life, freedom, and action, which was thwarted by the tyranny of every petty detail. Gideon Skull, she felt, would find her out wherever she might be—and this bare thought almost made her look upon him as her knight as well as her lover.

CHAPTER XX.

For Thou, quoth he, shall be my Wife,
And honoured for my Queen :
With Thee I mean to lead my Life,
As surely shall be seen.
Our Wedding shall appointed be,
And every Thing in its Degree :
Come on, quoth he, and follow me—

• • • • •

She was in great Amaze :
At last she spoke with trembling Voyce,
And said, O King, I doe rejoyce
That you will take me for your Choyce,
And my Degree's so base.

King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid.

MRS. REID had lost no time in moving with her daughter into other and cheaper quarters, sending notice of their removal to the office in Fleet Street, with a letter for Alan to be forwarded thence at the first opportunity. It was at last becoming a little strange that no letter for home had come from Alan. But no mother was ever cleverer at making excuses

for her son than Mrs. Reid. Helen's faults had always been sins, and Alan's, virtues. If Helen had been away from home and had not written to her for a month, she would have made up for her real indifference by irritating herself into anger. But if Alan had been silent for a whole year, she would have somehow managed to make it perfectly clear that nothing could be more natural in a young man than to be heedless ; and that if her heart wore itself out with anxious waiting, it would be no fault of Alan's. It had not always been with her quite like this. But Helen's secret walk with Gideon, and her lie to cover it, had brought about an atmosphere of watchful mistrust and suspicion between the mother and daughter ; while the deep-lying consciousness, which would now and again rise up to trouble her, of the desperately well-meant wrong she was doing her son, forbade her any longer to be less than exaggeratedly over-just to him in all other things. She refused to complain of, or even to see, his silence. She never spoke of it to Helen ; and if Helen ever mentioned it, she defended him

eagerly. No doubt there were difficulties in the way of private correspondence which they at home could not divine. Very likely he was not allowed to make use of Field-posts except for public correspondence. Even if he were, it was not likely he would have time for writing more than he was obliged. No doubt, considering all things, his official letter-writing would take up every spare minute he could find out of the saddle. No news must always be good news. If anything happened, they would be sure to hear. At any rate, whatever was the cause, Alan might be unambitious, but nobody could charge him with so much as the barest capacity for being unkind—and to his own mother! Why, except in taking this wretched newspaper work at all, he had been only too tender-natured. A little more hardness—short of absolute selfishness—was what she wished to give him. And so, in short, his silence must be right, because he was he; and if he was ceasing to be quite the same he, then his silence must be even more right still. Her having to put all this before Helen obliged her, for conscious con-

sistency's sake, to tell herself the same things when alone.

But were her arguments likely to satisfy Helen, who certainly did not yield to her mother in fancying that she was the only person on earth who really knew Alan? Probably not; if she, like Gideon Skull, had not found means to know more of her brother's doings and movements than her mother might share with her, it was a fortunate thing that Mrs. Reid was so determined to be satisfied on merely general grounds.

Gideon, we know, had arranged with Mr. Crowder to receive Alan's home letters. And Mrs. Reid, while shifting her quarters to escape from Gideon, had not forgotten to send her new address to the office, where he now called almost daily. She could hardly have done better than send it to the '*Argus*' had she wished the very man to know it on whose account she had made the change. But still, how should that affect Helen? Whatever letters there might be from Alan, she had received none of them.

It was certainly time for her to take

matters into her own hands. Justice and Copleston might have drifted away into dream-land. But it was no dream that her mother was drifting and sinking into that worst slough of poverty which pride makes hopeless, and that, if she herself did nothing, Alan must be dragged down and kept down by the weight of two women in addition to his proper burdens. She had not more than half thought of all this while dreaming of winning back Copleston for Alan, for one cannot think while one is dreaming. And, unless she took her own life into her own hands, fully and once for all, she must make up her mind to surrender herself to the shame of helplessness all her days. Twenty times, at least, she had tried to bring round her mother to her views. Every time her answer had been the same—‘ You must not disgrace Alan by making him the brother of a servant or a shop-girl.’ To Helen, who did not know that, in the natural course of things, everything was to be made right again in little more than six years, and that nothing was really required but the exercise of patience and content—for Alan’s

sake—her mother's eternal answer began at last to look like the very insanity of pride. One afternoon, she did what I suppose not more than one girl in a hundred would have waited half so long to do. She wrote to her brother's best friend—a man who could help her if he would, considering his place in the world, and who would if he could, she felt sure. He who had found a crust for Alan might find a crumb for her. It was not his fault that her mother objected to him on the score of his being some sort of a tradesman, nor was it hers that she was driven once more to deceive and to disobey. As for her own pride, she had parted with that at Temple Bar. And there is nothing to be ashamed of in disobeying and deceiving for their good the sick, the insane, the unreasonable, the obstinate, the proud, and all other weak creatures to whom only worse weakness than their own allows their own way.

It was not much of a letter. It made no mention of Copleston, and merely spoke of her pressing need to be put in the way of doing something to relieve Alan by supporting

herself, and, if possible, her mother also. Any girl might have written it to any man whom she had no reason for mistrusting—and everybody always trusted Gideon. After all, as she said to herself as she wrote it, if there was anything in the matter unlike the lady that Alan's sister ought to be, it was natural enough, seeing that she was not a lady. Ladies have surnames, and she had none. She would not allow herself the right to blush when she added, in a postscript, that she was obliged to act without her mother's knowledge, and that he must direct his answer to a post-office. In spite of the postscript, there are men enough who know the world too well to have been taken in by such a letter. But Gideon knew but a quarter of the world. It was just what he had expected—nay, was it not just what he had been planning for? So his rather reckless bid of ten thousand a year in the bush for Helen Reid, and possibly for Copleston, had not been made in vain. She had spread out her net for him a little sooner than he had looked for—that was all. All the better. The golden bird desired nothing

better than to be caught in any net she might choose to spread for him. He was pleased with himself; and he let himself enjoy the sensation of feeling his heart beat almost like a boy's at the prospect of a secret *rendezvous* with Helen. It was certainly first love in its way. He had not always looked forward to marriage as a condition of his purchasing a lady to add to his collection. But his actual knowledge, not only of the existence, but of the very place, of her father's will, had now made a regular and indisputable marriage a matter of business which justified his readiness to go even to such a length for the sake of Helen. Some people try to cover interest with romance, and make believe that they are marrying for true love when it is really for money. Gideon, on the contrary, tried to defend his first romance by good financial reasons, and made believe that he was going to marry for money's sake, when it was in truth for just as much love as he could feel. And, for that matter, his sort of love will go a great deal further than love of the sentimental sort ever dreams of going.

Naturally, when Helen called at the post-office two days afterwards in hopes of finding an answer, she found none. But Gideon knew that women live very much in grooves, and that her hour for calling one day would be her hour for calling on the next day also. And so it happened that, when she called at the post-office on the next day, she again found no answer. But, when she had left the counter, she met Gideon himself at the door.

He had not, thanks to Patience, seen her since their walk along Thames Bank, and he was not ill pleased to see her looking rather thin and worn. Victor Waldron, who had, after all, seen her but twice in his life, would have found it difficult to recognise in her either the girl overrunning with health, youth, and high spirits with whom he had been shut up in Hillswick church, or the scornful enemy who had declared war upon him in the church-yard. She certainly did not expect to meet Gideon Skull ; but she did not start ; and if she had, he would only have admired her the more for her acting.

‘ You see,’ he said abruptly, and with an entirely new incapacity for remembering, or saying without remembering what he had meant to say, ‘ I am come.’ He had the air of a slave of the lamp who has received a summons.

It is only too easy to be hard on Helen. I own that I have give her up ever since she passed through Temple Bar. Henceforth, if any excuses are to be found for her, it is not I who make them. It is not to coin excuses, but simply to string facts, when we go out of our way to remember all that had happened in her inner life since she left Copleston—all the less that had happened in her outer life ; how, save from Gideon, she had not touched a hand that seemed friendly or heard a word that was kind. Life had become a harsh tyranny—a close hedge presenting a face of iron thorns towards her on all sides, against which she felt herself being goaded to rebellion. After all, she was young—not one of her powers for life and joy, or her inborn thirst for them, had been destroyed : distortion makes such things more strong. Gideon’s

eagerness and hurry to serve her touched her keenly. She had been made to think of him as her knight—a rough and discourteous Sir Orson, it might be, but, therefore, all the trustier, according to the belief that you may know a true heart by a heavy hand and a rough tongue as surely as you may tell a false one by the signs of a Victor Waldron. She could not help the glow of a new sort of pride. Suppose that this man's coming to meet her instead of writing meant that he felt something more than friendly towards her—what then? At any rate it meant that, whatever had happened, there was a man in the world who cared for her, all poor, and friendless, and unhappy as she was; it meant something that she could never feel sure of so long as she had been the sister of Alan Reid of Copleston. She felt very much like a woman, and very little like an avenger, just then. Nobody could ever look down upon Gideon: and a woman who needed strength above all things, and had none of her own, could very easily learn to look up to him. She should have been angry at his coming,

but she could not find it in her heart to remember to be angry. She almost felt tears in her eyes at so suddenly feeling that she was not wholly alone.

He saw her eyes grow brighter, and a faint glow come into her cheeks ; and he felt himself more in love with her than ever. And, at the same time, his hunger to have Helen for himself, without much care whether she married him for love or money, appeared to pass into a new phase. There seemed something about her so new and so simply human and womanly to-day, that a sort of real knightliness towards her came over him—the sensation was so utterly new and strange that it simply bewildered him. When one has waited till over forty years old to feel anything of that kind, self-knowledge becomes rather hard. That must needs be a strange sort of day in which the sun does not rise until the afternoon.

‘*Is there anything I can do ?*’ asked she.

‘I—I don’t know,’ said Gideon absently. ‘What do you mean by “anything”? Of course I have been thinking. I haven’t been

thinking of much else, for that matter. You're in no hurry to go home, I hope? All this wants talking over. We can take a long round homeward, and talk as we go. What do you mean by "anything"?"

"I must be home soon. Anything—anything that will earn money. That is what I mean. We shall soon have nothing left at all—till Alan comes home; and then—how can I be a useless burden upon him? If I must give up the battle for him, I must not tie his hands. And Alan—you know those people at the office: we have not heard from him, or of him, almost ever since he went away."

"Oh," said Gideon, "*he's* all right! They get his copy, and that's all right, so he can't possibly be wrong. Why should he be? I take it, if he does his duty, he must give up writing home. You can't expect a man who isn't made of cast-iron to be about in the saddle all day, and to be talking and drinking all the evening, and to be writing half the night, and then, instead of getting a few hours' sleep, to take up his pen again and spin out more copy for his mother and sister."

You'd know soon enough if anything went wrong—why, it would be public news. I'm at the office every day, so I should be the first to hear—and you the second. Men may go without rest and sleep to write to their sweethearts, but to nobody else that I ever heard. No—the question is about you. But I can hardly hear for all this noise. We'll cross the park—we can talk better there.'

'I suppose it must be as you say—about Alan. . . . Is there anything I can do for us all?'

'Honestly—No.'

'You mean that I can do nothing—nothing in the whole world? That I am only fit to look on and see my mother starve? I cannot. Sooner than that, I must do anything—the lowest and meanest thing: anything, right or wrong.'

'I—I'm afraid you don't know what a girl is taken to mean, when she talks that way.'

'Is it not what I said when I talked of doing something else for Alan? This is for Alan too.'

‘ Oh—of course—for Alan ! Yes. You did say that. I don’t forget what you say. And there was no way, neither a right nor a wrong. And there is none now.’

‘ Hundreds of girls——’

‘ Yes—hundreds of girls do hundreds of things well that you can’t do at all.’

‘ Is that all you came to tell me ? I thought——’

‘ No. It is not all. There is something—well, that you *can* do, that no other girl can do at all. Listen to me.’

‘ What is it ? I will do it, whatever it may be.’

‘ You have no means left—no means at all ? ’

‘ I don’t know how little—or how long what we have will last : but not for long ; and then——’

‘ You will be absolutely without a penny in the world ? Is that what you mean ? ’

‘ Utterly without a penny in the world.’

‘ Yes—and then your brother will come back : wars don’t last for ever, worse luck : I wish they did, with all my heart and soul.

I suppose he will have some money due to him——’

‘ And it must be his. He must not come back to find that he has to spend it all in paying his mother’s and sister’s bills for food and lodging. Alan—Alan *must* be rich—I alone know why. Do you think it was for the sake of the land that I wanted Copleston back for Alan?’

‘ You won’t listen. You don’t know what I mean. I mean that whatever money is due to him will hardly keep him till he earns more. You don’t know what these times are —talk of a girl earning enough to keep herself and her mother like ladies, when thousands of men, with brains and with muscles too, think themselves lucky if they can make some seventy pounds a year! Of course, I might be able to do something for *him*—but——’

‘ But—for me, you were going to say? What is the one thing that you say even I can do?’

‘ And that you say you will do, whatever it may be. Be my wife.’

He said ‘Be my wife,’ in so grave and

simple a fashion that she was almost surprised at not feeling surprised. She certainly had no wish to become the wife of Gideon Skull, or of any man. But it was impossible to doubt that he was perfectly serious. And even if he had really understood her, he could not have done better than make his offer in that manner, without any of the conventional sentiment which can only become poetry by being shared. In truth, Gideon had been forced to bring out his question in that rough and almost savage fashion because he had a sort of a suspicion that there must be some fit and appropriate way of making love to ladies, if he only knew it; but that, not knowing it, instinct preferred the straight line to the risks of taking any haphazard and probably altogether misleading curve. If he had begun by talking to her like a lover, so as to lead up gracefully and poetically to its climax, she would have known how to answer him very well: but the more delicate style, though it had been beaten out over days and weeks of wooing, would not have had half the effect upon a girl who did not love him of this

sudden command. There must needs be more heart and strength in one of three words than in ten of three thousand. If a woman loves, she prefers the three thousand, for the sake of prolonging the pleasure. But Helen would not have listened to the three thousand ; and she could not help listening to the three.

She did not answer him at all. What is there about plain questions that always makes it impossible to answer them plainly ? It was not a common case of the proverb about the Castle that speaks and the Woman who does not know what to say. She was neither lost nor won. But she could not say a plain ‘ No ’ that might serve once for all. He deserved more than the most grateful ‘ No ’ that her heart could spell. He was rich : she was poor. He was an absolutely free man ; her husband must take, with her, the accompanying burdens of an unmanageable mother and a brother whose fortune had to be made. He was certainly not a man of birth or rank : but had he been a ragpicker, and the son—if only the lawful son—of a ragpicker, he would have had to stoop to the hand of a girl with

no birth, no honest calling, and no name. He *must* care for her, or his ‘Be my wife’ would have been the words of a madman. She had come to feel so low, and so helpless, and so contemptible in her own eyes, that any man who could possibly want her seemed to have a sort of right to her. Not every man may lawfully take possession of a pearl that comes in his way: but the common broken shell cannot say to any chance finder with a fancy for its worthless fragments, ‘No: you have no right to me; I don’t belong to you.’ The pearl can belong to one only, but its shell to anybody in the world.

‘Yes. Be my wife,’ said Gideon again: this time more humbly, and with some tone of pleading. And, though he believed that she was drawing him deliberately into her net, the humbler and more pleading tone was no mere form. He had felt to-day as if there were something about her which she could not sell him: and he wanted this too.

‘I shall never marry anybody,’ said Helen —quite quietly, and as if an offer of marriage were as common as a ‘Good Morning.’ For

that matter, with her it had really become as common a thing. ‘I suppose you *are* sorry for me, as strong men always are for creatures that can’t help themselves. I have felt like that for broken-winged birds ; but I haven’t wanted to marry them.—Oh, you don’t know how grateful I am ! Much too grateful to thank a friend who cares for me and mine by giving him a bad wife, such as I should be.’

‘That is all nonsense,’ said Gideon roughly, in the tone he used when brought face to face with any form of the hypocrisy which he despised. ‘I dare say you would make a bad wife to ninety-nine men out of a hundred. That’s nothing to me. I’m the hundredth man. And if I wasn’t, I know what I want : I always know what I want, and I mostly get it too.’

They were not alone in the park, but love-making like this might have been made in the public streets—he might have been a heavy father who was making the course of true love as rough as he could for some troublesome and obstinate daughter, so far as any passer-by could tell. His last words, so far as they

implied a boast beforehand, gave a little prick to the pride that Helen chose to think was dead and buried in her.

'I have said my say,' said she. 'Thank you with all my heart and soul for giving me a new belief—if you say you care for me, it must be true, seeing what you are, and what I am. But—I am married to Alan, you know. I am glad you are his friend.'

'So, she wants to drive a bargain?' thought Gideon. 'Well, with all my heart—that's only natural and fair. Only, confound that eternal brother of hers, all the same Of course,' he said, 'I don't expect you—yet awhile—to care a straw for me, except as for a man who can help *you*. As for the rest—well, I'm not afraid—everything in its own time. I shall never let you hate me, anyhow. As a man who can help you, then—can, yes, and will, while he has a shilling or a drop of blood left to spend for you; for you and yours. Why, I wouldn't feel jealous if you married me only to climb by. What else do women marry men for? They get to like the ladder for its own sake, after-

wards, often enough to make the risk worth running. Do you suppose any man, who isn't quite an idiot, thinks a woman wants to marry him for the sake of his beauty, or his wisdom, or his virtue, or the way he does his hair? Why, a woman might just as well think that a man wants to marry her best gown. I don't ask you to care for *me*—I'm content to run that chance—Helen. I know it isn't like blockade-running, where it's eleven to one against winning, but where, to win once, it's worth while to lose ten times over. One can't marry eleven wives. But I swear I'd rather lose ten times over with you than win a hundred times running with any woman in the world. Think. Think what it would be for that con—for Alan to have a sister married to a man worth at least ten thousand a year, and a man, too, who could put him in the way of making ten thousand a year of his own. Why, he might buy back Copleston—who knows? And, if he didn't, Copleston isn't the only place in England. There's your mother, too—think of her. She'd be angry at first, of course, but

she'd thank you in a year. And you—who would do anything for Alan, right or wrong—stand thinking and doubting as soon as a real chance comes to you! It's not as if I were old enough to be your grandfather, or a sick man whom you'd have to nurse, or a miser, or any worse than his neighbours in any way. How many men can say, as I can, that I never loved a woman till I saw *the* one, the first that I ever wanted to be my wife—and the last too? I want you in my life ; that's enough for me. I can do all things that you want done ; that should be more than enough for you."

This see-saw between real but uneloquent passion and the most prosaic bargaining contained many coarse touches which Gideon might have avoided had he kept to a few strong words, and which a girl who had ever been brought into contact with real coarseness in any shape could hardly have failed to see. But a woman must have the too late experience of many years before she can tell when and how a man is not a gentleman, however well she can tell by instinct when he

is one. . As it was, he had said many things that jarred upon her ; though only so far as all romantic prejudice must needs be jarred upon by inexorable prose.

‘ You mean—that you want to marry me for Alan’s sake ? ’ she asked. ‘ No—it is impossible——’

‘ No,’ said Gideon. ‘ It is not for Alan’s sake that *I* want to marry *you*. It is for my own sake, as selfishly as you please. It isn’t even for yours ; it’s for my own. But if it is only for Alan’s sake *you* would marry *me*—let it be for Alan’s sake. Any sake will do. I shall know why you marry me, never fear. I shall try to make you care for me a great deal ; but, if you can’t, I will remember why you married me—Alan shan’t lose. In spite of himself, he shall be as rich as a Jew. As his friend and well-wisher, I can help him to a crumb or two ; but how can I do what a rich sister can ? When Waldron bursts up—as he must—I’ll find the money to buy back Copleston. Helen—I only want you.’

It certainly did feel to her like a piece of miserable weakness that she, who had once

gone so far as to dream, for Alan's sake, of bringing to her feet a villain like Waldron, should feel the least scruple about taking advantage of Gideon Skull. 'All for Alan,' indeed, when she was hesitating over the only thing that was left her to do for him—and if it were but a little thing for him, what matter whether it were great or small for her? The sacrifice, if it were one, ought to be only too easy. There was simply no sort of intelligible objection to Gideon, except a certain want of polish and of refinement in thought—and even this was a wholesome contrast to the smooth ways which she had learned to associate with all things false and mean. He was a strong and true man; one on whom, as on a tower of strength, any woman or any man might safely lean. It was not as if he were one by whom, even if no love ever came, a wife would find it hard to do her duty, while it would be easy to give him respect, gratitude, and honour. There was something almost touching, and certainly balm-like to her pride, in his eagerness to give her all things for the sake of a chance of liking in return. And,

above all, it was not as if he asked her to come to him on false pretences, professing, either by words or silence, a love which she could not feel. There was no first love to stand in her way ; she was called upon to be false neither to him nor to any man—how could she pause twice before such an All for Alan ?

She was even ashamed of pausing. But she did pause ; and Gideon, wondering what he could possibly have omitted to urge, had to leave her that morning disappointed, anxious, and hardly answered. But her No had not been a real No—certainly not such a No as she could bring back to her mother. Helen had wholly learned that, whatever she did, she must take her whole life into her own hands. It was in spite of herself that her mother must be saved.

CHAPTER XXI.

If I the Sun
Had placed on high to guide this errant star,
I had not made him fitful, faint, and far :
 But he had shone

Nigh, strong, and constant. And if I the Rose
Had made, who is the garden's liege and Queen,
Thornful and fit for fading had not been
 Her transient glows.

What need I but one life wherein to give
The touches God forgot ? Ah God, that I,
Who would make good Thy flaws, am bound to die
 Before I live !

No letter came from Alan. But his mother had at last cultivated obstinate faith in her own opinions into a severe system of self-defence. If she gave up one inch of her system, she must give up her whole plan. She had determined that nothing which Alan could possibly do or leave undone could possibly be wrong. It was part of her system that he was very much too tender-natured ;

and if she was wrong in one least point, she might just as well own that she had been mistaken from the beginning. And she had certainly not gone through all this for nothing.

And so it happened that her resolute satisfaction with things as they ought not to be relieved Helen's mind from the weight of knowing that all was well with Alan, without being able to share her knowledge with her mother. She did once or twice summon up courage to mention Gideon's name, but it would have been the height of folly to mention it a third time. To escape from Gideon was also part of the system, or at any rate had become so. Helen knew that her mother, with her proud Welsh blood stung and sharpened by Pride's twin-sister, Poverty, would far rather see her in her grave than the wife of Gideon Skull. To inflame monomania by argument is worse than absurd. It was not good to go against her mother in so great a thing ; but obedience would be worse and more selfish still, and whatever had to be done for Alan must be done. It must even be

without Alan's knowledge; for she much feared that he would be one with his mother in this matter. They must be able to reap the harvest without the shame and labour of having had to sow the seed for themselves. All the labour and all the shame must be hers alone. They would forgive her when it was too late for anything but pardon; and, even if they could not, she would be able to help them in spite of their pride. And as for Alan, if his pride could stand against her, it would surely melt before Bertha.

But how, in ten books, can one trace Helen's whole heart and mind? Sense and folly, heroism and weakness, pride and self-scorn, recklessness and duty, cowardice and courage, romance and necessity—who may end such an infinite catalogue?—were all confused and tangled into a kind of chaos infinitely beyond her own comprehending. And, then, things were getting worse and worse at home. She could not make out how it was that they had not reached the end of their resources long ago. Literally, there was only one thing left, and that must be done

without any of the helpless, and worse than useless, talk which only disturbs decision and hinders and defeats action.

It must not be supposed that, with all her confusion about the rights and wrongs of life, she could go on, day after day, in an atmosphere of the wretched little secrets which are the detestable spawn of great ones, without the consciousness, deformed and distorted as it was, that she was doing something heroic, and was only doing and bearing evil that good might come to him for whom she had bound herself to do and to bear all things. But she could not always keep herself up to the needful pitch of heroic zeal. Often and often she felt very unlike a heroine, and very like a very mean sort of schoolgirl who is trying to act a novel. On such occasions, she had often written half a letter to Gideon to tell him that she was too weak to do even thus much for Alan, and to ask him to forget that there was a Helen Reid in the world. But the letter never got finished. Even for so much as that she was too weak or else too strong. She could not write, ‘There is some-

thing that I cannot do for Alan.' And her will had become sadly weakened, which was certainly not the case with Gideon's. She knew well enough that he did not mean to let her go. If she could make the only man who loved her happy enough with a tenth part of a heart, she could do so much, at least, for somebody in the world.

But at last came one morning when she never felt less like a heroine, and never more miserable. It was a fine, bright day, too, such as girls and girls' friends like to have for a wedding day. Between Helen and the weather there was generally a very close sympathy. It was mostly on dull days that she had written those half-letters to Gideon. But to-day it was as if there were thunder in some inner air. She came down purposely late to breakfast, for she dreaded to meet her mother and to talk about everyday things. There was as little sympathy between Helen and her mother as between Helen and the sunshine. Mrs. Reid had already looked at the two empty plates, on which no letter was ever laid, and, for the first time, she saw something in her

daughter's pale cheeks and heavy eyes that obliged her, at last, to think of somebody besides Alan. No doubt Helen's want of courage and patience had terribly disappointed her. But she had not reckoned upon the chance of illness for one who had never been really ill since she was born, and to whom headaches were things unknown.

'Don't you feel well, Helen?' she asked, half gently, half reproachfully. 'What has made you so late? And you are not eating, I see——'

Helen gathered her strength together. 'I am well—quite well. There, mother——'

'Well, Helen?'

Nothing could be more discouraging than Mrs. Reid's way of saying 'Well, Helen?' It was especially discouraging to-day.

'If there were any great thing I could do for Alan, something very great indeed——'

'You can do something—something very great indeed; the greatest thing in the world.'

'What is that?'

'You know.'

'Oh, to be patient—and brave. Of course

—I try to be that; but I'm not patient for him; and I'm not brave like you. I don't mean those things. I mean something real—something that one can do——'

‘Helen, I will not hear one word of your governess scheme again. *That* is not being patient—nor brave. When Alan becomes what he will become——’

‘You still think he would be ashamed of my having to do something while he was poor?’

‘It is not what he would feel, but what you ought to do. Don’t speak of it again.’

‘Suppose I found some man—some very rich man—who would marry me for myself, and help Alan for my sake——’

‘Are you mad, Helen? Is it such a chance as *that* that makes you want to leave home? And if there was such a man, is it like Alan’s sister to——’

‘But suppose there were such a man, who could, and would, do all things that I say?’

‘Who can answer such a question? If you loved him, and if he loved you, and if, as

well as rich, he was well born and a gentleman, and if he was a good man besides, and not in trade, and one of whom Alan and I could approve—well, I suppose you ought to marry him for your own sake, and not for Alan's. But if you married him *only* for Alan's sake and without loving him, or if he was of birth and rank lower than you would have looked for when we were at home, or if he was not a good man, or not religious, or not moral, or if he was a tradesman—why, you might as well talk of marrying—Gideon Skull! I should have thought you would know that as well as I.'

Helen flushed crimson. Why should her mother have dragged in the name of Gideon as the type of the man whom she ought not to marry? No—it was clear that she might as well try to make a confidante of a rock as of her mother. Apart as they were, Helen felt as if they must be living in different worlds. There was something her mother loved better than Alan, after all—her own pride. And then, that wretched prejudice against Gideon for being Gideon, and against

trade for being trade—she could only sigh and say no more.

But Mrs. Reid had seen the blush, and had by no means spoken at hazard when she mentioned Gideon. Could it be possible that the walk of long ago had meant even more than she had dreaded at the time?

‘Never let me hear that man’s name again,’ she said.

‘It was you mentioned him, mamma—not I.’

‘Then, *I* will not mention him again.’

It was quite clear that Helen must find sense and strength for both, and must turn heroine at last—once for all.

Helen might look ill, and even feel ill: but Mrs. Reid, without showing a single sign of illness, had become conscious of certain symptoms which, not alarmed her, but troubled her. Nothing had gone as she wished thus far, and her suppressed anxiety about Alan’s silence was amply enough to bring about one kind of heart-sickness. Her sudden change of life and her self-imprisonment at her time of

life, in what to her was the unnatural atmosphere of London lodgings, were as bad for her health as anything could be: and the bare fact of her sharing the same roof and the same table with Helen did not save her from living absolutely alone. She was living for her secret: and who can live for a secret without being worn out by inches? In short, she was torturing herself by a prolonged martyrdom: and nothing but its hardness prevented her from giving way. She still believed that she had done what was right, and was the last woman on earth to let herself be turned aside by any trouble or suffering which it might bring to her. In Helen's place she would not have doubted, even for an instant, whether she ought to marry Gideon: the two were, after all, far more fully mother and daughter than she and Alan were mother and son. But none of these things wholly accounted for the exact manner in which her health, or at any rate her strength, was beginning to fail her. She had never been active in her ways, like her husband and her children; but still it was a

new thing to her to feel it needful to sit down and rest after going up or down stairs ; and she had become subject to alternate numbness and burning of the feet and hands, which often extended nearly to the shoulders, and was sometimes accompanied by a sense of general oppression and pain. She was certainly not nervous about herself ; and the Hoëls of Pontargraig had always been a tough race, and famous, within their narrow circle, for length of life in a country where life runs longer than in any other country in the world. Besides, it was out of the question that anything should go seriously wrong with her before the end of the seven years. Nobody is ever permitted to die—she had read on high authority—until his or her allotted task on earth is fulfilled. It was only just and rational that it should be so : and certainly the most sceptical may be defied to find any convincing evidence to the contrary. But, without wanting either faith or courage, one may be prudent. And it so happened that on this very day she had planned to get rid of Helen for an hour or two in the morning, so that

she might consult a physician without letting her errand be suspected. For her going out alone would have been a very noteworthy event in such a life as she and Helen led in London.

And it so happened that Helen was so anxious to leave the house alone that morning, that no common excuse or errand seemed good enough to suit her. They had become shy of one another; indeed, when Helen and her mother sat lingering over the breakfast-table—Helen vainly seeking a good reason for going out alone, her mother trying to think of an errand upon which to send her: both anxious for the same thing, both for a secret reason, and neither able to think of an open commonplace one.

‘But you *are* ill, Helen,’ said Mrs. Reid, at last. ‘If you have no headache now, you will have; you seem all nervous and unstrung. I cannot afford to have you ill. It is such a fine morning—go and take a walk in the air. It is the best thing you can do.’

‘Yes,’ said Helen. ‘I suppose it is the best thing I can do with myself to-day.’ But

she felt that she had never known what shame meant until then. To have the door opened for her like that, in kindness and in trust, and to take advantage of it, felt worse a hundred times than telling a lie. Disobedience and deceit might be right : but this felt like treachery. But—to-day, at least—she had not the right to do as she pleased. She could only change her answer. ‘ No—I have no headache, and I don’t feel ill. But I will go out——’

‘ Yes—go out : what is the use of our being so near the park if you lose the fine mornings ? ’

‘ Mamma——’

‘ Well, Helen ? ’

‘ If—if I ever did—anything—that seemed—that might seem—very strange and wrong—for Alan—to help Alan—if I ever do—*only* for him—would you remember that I think nothing wrong that I do for him ? Oh, mamma, if you only knew what he has lost, *you* would think nothing wrong for Alan ! ’

‘ Good gracious, Helen ! What do you mean ? He has lost Copleston—he will gain

something far better and higher, I trust and believe. How can *your* doings, right or wrong, help him to get back the worse or gain the better? Who has ever dreamed of your doing wrong?' But Mrs. Reid was growing really anxious at last. She did think her daughter capable of disgracing herself—had not that been proved? But she had not thought her capable of developing morbid or nervous humours like these. It had been part of her scheme that Helen should accept everything that came, without questioning or breaking down. And now she seemed ready to turn hysterical. 'Do go out, and take a good brisk walk,' she said. 'And—Helen——'

A new thought had come to her. What could Helen do for Alan that could look half so wrong in surface-reading eyes as what she herself had already done, and was doing still? It was a new light; there are days and hours for us all when the nature of our eyes seems to change. Often enough the change has no meaning but for the moment; but sometimes —well, there is a relation between souls and bodies which it is waste of time to try to

understand. All who have ever chanced to behold the courage of the coward, the cowardice of the brave, the justice of the unjust, the illumination of the blind, will know something of what such things mostly mean.

‘My dear Helen,’ she said, as tenderly as her long repression of all tender ways allowed, ‘we both of us live for our boy, you as well as I. Some day all will be well, never fear. Only, we must give our boy time to become a man. Meanwhile, nothing that is done for him, really and truly for him, can be wrong. If it is wrong, it is not done truly and really for him. There are many right things that nobody will ever be able to understand. But we must do them all the same. What others may think of them, what does that matter to us a straw?’ She had forgotten her text, and was thinking only of the defence that she herself would need. ‘We have only to do what we know *must* be right, cost us what it will. It is all we women are made for, it seems to me.’

‘Mamma, one thing more.’

‘ Well, Helen? ’

‘ We think the same. If ever *I* do wrong—what seems wrong—for Alan—you will understand.’

Mrs. Reid could not help starting. Could her own secret have been divined? Was all this talk only Helen’s way of saying to her what Nathan said unto David? It was impossible, but it seemed as if the tables were somehow being turned. She looked at Helen, but saw nothing that she could read. But what she had said had been life and strength to Helen, who, moved by a long-forgotten impulse, suddenly knelt down and put her forehead to the lips of her mother.

‘ Say,’ said Helen, ‘ that you know that all I want to do is that one thing—all for *him*. ’

‘ Surely I know that,’ said her mother, both with earnestness and with anxious wonder at what Helen could mean. But it was the earnestness alone that Helen heard. Sympathy would be better than pardon. She could go out now with courage for all things that might come. It was unlucky that these two were so much alike. Sympathy would have

been easy and full, if Helen had been like Alan.

Mrs. Reid waited quietly till Helen had left the house. The talk, which had almost grown into one of those scenes which she disliked and avoided, had tried her already ; it was certainly one of her bad days. So she went to the sofa, and was not sorry that Helen went out without coming back to the parlour. It was horribly annoying, this trick of being made to feel almost faint with the least exertion. She was as much ashamed of it as if it were something wrong. It was impossible that anything could be the matter with her heart, because such a thing as heart disease, in any form, had been utterly unknown among the Pontargraig branch of the Hoëls, who never went out of their way to get anything, from money upwards, which did not come to them by nature. And then she had read, or been told, that diseases of the heart are rarely accompanied by pain. It was of heart disease that her husband had died, and he had seemed as well when he went out fishing as he had ever been—she remembered

his good spirits when he left her, and how nothing had been farther than the shadow of sudden death from their minds. It was not likely that a husband and wife should have the same trouble; still less likely that the hearts of the Reids, who were, after all, but people of the day before yesterday, should have anything of so much consequence in common with the hearts of the Hoëls, who were at least three times as old as the Waldrons themselves.

Still, it would be as well to see a doctor, and it might be as well to see a lawyer also: for that will in the Reverend Christopher Skull's bankers' custody had given her certain powers of bequest which she ought not to leave unused. Though she might be as hale and sound as her husband had seemed on the day of his death, and though her heart might be as strong as her will, still, every minute of every day brings chances of sudden death with which the state of the heart, or of any other organ, has nothing to do. What is a heart out of order but one chance of sudden death the more added to ten thousand others?

But, now that she had got her daughter out of the way, she still felt unwilling to move. She seemed to have to think of so many things—her great scheme for making Alan all over again would perhaps never have had birth could she have foreseen all its turns and details. Her faith had not waned : she still told herself that she was glad she had not foreseen. It had not proved so easy as she had thought it, and as rich and comfortable people always think it, to give up for the sake of principle the comforts which we never heed while we have them.

‘I wish Alan were home again,’ thought she. And so, having touched the centre of her pain, she at last got ready to start on her own errand. It was already later than she ought to start if she wanted to be sure of being home again before Helen.

She was almost in the passage on her way to the street-door when she was delayed by a knock ; and presently she was told that a gentleman wished to see her. It sounded impossible—and that her first visitor should have chosen the first hour when she really cared not to be delayed, made the whole day

look bent upon going wrong. But she dared not say she was not at home. People with secrets are denied the luxury of feeling indifferent about the business of unseasonable callers. It might be the Reverend Christopher Skull, or—the hope leaped up in her—might it be Alan himself come home, and amusing himself with a minute's mystery? But it was neither; only a tall, lean, pale, more than solemn-faced man whom she had never seen before.

‘Mrs. Reid?’ asked he. She bowed.

‘My name is Crowder,’ said he. And that was all that he appeared to intend to say. Mrs. Reid felt that she ought to have some sort of association with the name, but could not remember how, or when, or where. She had never taken the smallest heed of the details of Alan’s engagement; and the name of his employer, if it had ever entered at one ear, had immediately gone out at the other. She could only wait for him to tell his business. But he remained dumb.

‘I cannot remember’—she was obliged at last to begin——

‘I represent the “Spraggville Argus” in

this city,' said he. And again he was dumb.

'The newspaper that my son—well—you have news of him? A letter——'

She stopped short. It was not Mr. Crowder's natural solemnity that startled her. She had never set eyes on the man till now; and yet she was able to recognise a look in his eyes that she knew was not always in them, perhaps had never been in them before.

'He is ill?' she said suddenly. 'Where can I find him?—how soon can I reach him? What has happened?'

Still Mr. Crowder was dumb.

'What has happened to Alan?'

Mr. Crowder looked away. He was equal to facing most things, and believed himself capable of facing all. But, without any reason, Mrs. Reid was not the sort of woman to whom he had come to tell what he had to tell. If he had come prepared with speech, it was gone; and for once he felt that the '*Argus*' was not the heart of the whole world. Was it even the whole of his own?

How, with those anxious eyes suppli-

cating, nay, commanding news that might be borne, was he to say what he had come to say? His eyes could only fall before hers; and that told her all. He had meant to break the news to her tenderly: he had left Mr. Sims in sole charge, that a stranger to him might not be startled by a certain double-leaded paragraph in the ‘*Argus*’ which of course she read faithfully; and now he almost wished he had not come. He felt he had done a braver thing than if he had led a charge against a regiment of Prussian Grenadiers. And it was true.

‘Alan is dead!’ said she.

It was not a cry, but a most desolate moan. For an instant her limbs seemed giving way under her, and he moved towards her. But she did not fall; she did not even seek to support herself; she stood straight and rigid, groping in the air with her hands as if she had been suddenly struck blind.

Even he, who did not know her, felt that she was battling hard for enough strength not to give way before a stranger. He had seen such things in his own Civil War. But then,

in his own war, mothers and daughters and wives had enthusiasm, and the pride of giving up all things for the great Cause, to yield them greater strength than their own ; here, there was only the mother of an only son, dead for no cause greater than the pocket of the owner of the ‘Argus,’ and with no strength but such as she could find in her own soul.

‘How did he die?’

‘Doing his duty,’ said Mr. Crowder almost in the telegraphic tone of his friend and enemy Mr. Sims. ‘He had entered Pahrus among the first, he and another Amurcan. It was his duty to go. You have read what went on after the siege ; and I assure you the “Argus” is no more to blame for it than—Well ! He and his companion got mixed up with a crowd and a woman. They got the woman through, but— No ; he couldn’t have suffered. A man does not feel in the skin when he is fighting hard with his blood well up ; and a stab or a bullet, till it gets cold, is not so bad as a blow. And I conclude that a journalist, or any man who is killed for his journal or for his fellow-man, is

as good as any soldier who is killed because he will be shot if he runs away. We are a Peace Journal. And those who die in the great cause of peace and progress are martyrs of whom their fellow-citizens will some day be as proud as the citizens of Spraggville are to-day.' His style of speech did not sound the least strange. They were kind words, meant to give Alan's mother such strength and after-comfort as might come from knowing that her son was not only dead, but was praised and honoured for dying well. After that terrible first word, Mrs. Reid's brain seemed well-nigh too numbed to feel. Even Mr. Crowder felt that she had far better have fallen in a dead swoon than be thus standing before him, rigid and hard-eyed like a woman of stone.

'I thank you,' she said. 'You say that Alan Reid died fighting against numbers for a woman, like a gentleman—he is a Hoël—'

'Like a Man—like a Man!' said Mr. Crowder sharply, alarmed at such signs of wandering wits, and trying to startle them back to their place again. 'Is there anything that I can do for you? There must be many

things—are you alone here? Of course not, though. Shall I communicate with our friend Gideon Skull?’

If he had said with the Emperor of Tartary, it would have meant the same to her. Since Alan was dead, it was as likely as not that Gideon Skull, or anybody else, should be mentioned to her by Mr. Crowder.

‘I thank you,’ she said again. ‘I am not alone. If you will leave me, I shall be much obliged. Miss Reid will be home soon now——’

He had to leave her : there was a spasm about her lips while she spoke which showed that a strange presence was becoming more than she could bear. But, even when he was gone, she did not give way. She only went back to the sofa, and turned her face to the wall.

What must be done, must at times be done in haste, for fear lest the strength we have to do it should fail.

Alan’s mother was not thinking of her daughter, God knows. If she had been—now

—she would only have thought herself lost in another dream.

She would have seen the interior of a strange church, twice as large as that of Hills-wick, nearly as worn out, and three times as dark and dusty—a wilderness of huge galleries and baize-lined pews, into which the sun, unsoftened by colour, seemed to stare sullenly and only because he was obliged. At the east end she would have seen a communion table fenced in by thick wooden railings like dwarfed bed-posts ; and, flanked on the right by a well-dressed young gentleman and on the left by a clerk and a pew-opener, she would have seen, standing before a surpliced clergyman, Gideon Skull and Helen. It might have seemed natural to her—in a dream. She would have seen the giving of the ring that was to transform Alan Reid of Copleston into the brother of Gideon Skull.

Helen and her husband parted at the church door. She was certain she had done what was right, and indeed it was needful for her to be certain, henceforth and for ever. The door for compunction and regret had

been closed for her, she could fancy, without the help of her own hands. She had certainly driven an excellent bargain; for so long as she allowed him to be her husband, Gideon had been perfectly ready to give way to her in all things, even in what he must have thought her idlest whims. Not only had he been made clearly to understand that it was for her brother's sake alone that she had brought herself to allow him to marry her—she was not even to be asked to leave her mother until she pleased; and her dread of having to make her confession met with such complete sympathy and acquiescence from Gideon, that she had resolved to put it off until to-morrow. It did seem strange to her that doing right should always seem so hard—first the doing and then the telling. Well: it was all for Alan, and her mother would understand.

So—half wondering that she felt in no wise stronger or better than half an hour ago—she first kept Gideon to his promise by bidding him good-bye till at least to-morrow, and, as soon as she could, got rid of Lord Ovoca, who had been Gideon's best man, and

who insisted on seeing the bride at least part of the way home. The young man never saw anything odd in anything that was out of the common ; his own life ran so much out of the groove that he had no surprise left for any but common ways. The secret marriage, and the parting at the church door, must needs be right, because they tasted in his mouth like sawdust flavoured with orange-peel. He was rather obtrusive in his attentions to Helen, but his brogue and his general easiness of going always saved him from offending anybody ; but even he was made to feel at last that the bride wanted to be left alone on her wedding-day. His chief reflection on the whole matter was, ‘ Fancy the feelings of a girl who’s had a decent name of her own when she hears herself called for the first time—Mrs. Gideon Skull ! ’

But neither to-day nor to-morrow—that day which never comes!—was Helen to tell her mother her new name. By the time she reached home, her mother had died, without moving from where she had lain down.

CHAPTER XXII.

I read it in a strange old book,
When hours were long and sunny,
How some one from a Fairy took
A purse for making money.
No more than half a pair of shaks
Would bid a bag of leather
Snow down, like Mother Carey's flakes,
Ten thousand pounds together.

How oft I wish, nor wonder why,
That fairies still were common,
Nor bade each girl and boy Good-bye
Who turns to man or woman !
For, just as clearly as I see
The cock on parish steeple,
I know they'd give that purse to me,
And not to common people.

MR. DEMETRIUS ARISTIDES, who represented the respectable side of his firm, lived at Bayswater in very good style, and, out of business hours, held very little social communication with his junior partner, Mr. Sinon. Many people, judging by the very different view of their house presented by the two partners,

both in business and society, mistook it for two different houses, whereas it was in reality entirely the same, and scarcely differed from a hundred others in having two different doors. Mr. Sinon, his partner himself felt compelled to confess, was far too much of a *roué* and a gambler for a merchant of the City of London. On the other hand, Mr. Sinon was exceedingly fond, behind his partner's back, of girding at him as a pedant, a miser, and a humbug, who, though born in the Levant, was no better than a common Englishman. Mr. Sinon seemed to throw away, with both hands, all the profits that Mr. Aristides made. But one advantage they had, which presumably worked well. The foes of one were the natural friends of the other, so that either partner could afford to lose a personal friend without necessarily costing the firm a client or customer. And then their divergence of character enabled them to carry on many very opposite forms of business which greater harmony of nature must have made impossible. In short, Mr. Sinon was the sharp, dashing, bachelor partner; Mr. Aristides the honest, respect-

able, domestic one. And they were of perfect accord in considering each other indispensable. They were seldom seen together, even at their joint office in the City, and Mr. Sinon did not pay his partner's family more than one visit a year—that is to say, when he brought Madame Aristides an offering of sugarplums on Old New Year's day. But they had never been known to have a dispute, except very publicly indeed, and when it was a matter of policy as well as of temper to hurl at one another those magnificently resonant epithets of Eastern Greece which are to our noisiest Billingsgate what thundering rocks are to clattering pebbles. And they never bore malice, but forgave one another instantly as soon as they were alone.

Mr. Demetrius Aristides was really, and without the faintest tinge of sarcasm at the expense of a most respectable word, a highly respectable man. He was even a good Christian, of the orthodox Levantine school, and hated Jews like poison. So orthodox was he that this was the second, if not the very first, article in his creed. He felt it his

duty to attack them in business at every turn, and almost always came off the winner. He was a cosmopolitan steeped in national prejudices. Thus he objected to Scotchmen, on principle, because it wastes time and ruins temper to deal with people who will consider, one by one, every one of the four hundred thousand sixpences in ten thousand pounds. He was cynically indifferent to Irish wrongs, as affecting a country which has more to gain than to lose; but he liked England, and he adored America as the land of a spending, speculating, and, above all, impulsive and confiding people who gave him a great deal of pleasure and no trouble at all. Ten Yankees to beat one Jew, ten Jews to beat one Scotchman, ten Scotchmen to beat one Genoese, ten Genoese to beat one Greek, ten Greeks to beat one Demetrius Aristides, was one of his multiplication tables, and he found it fairly accurate on the whole. The match for ten of himself he had not yet found—not even in Mr. Sinon, who had many genuine weaknesses, while his own armour had proved hitherto without a flaw.

His wife, Madame Aristides, with splendid black eyes that had once made her beautiful, but with a degree of stoutness that no longer allowed her to be graceful, and with an imperfect knowledge of English that happily concealed her nearly perfect ignorance of everything, was an ex-ballet-dancer whose father had been a brigand of some note in his day ; but she passed very well in London as a foreign lady. He was an art patron—especially in the matter of paintings, which are always worth money, while a song, once sung and heard, is as unprofitable as a cab that has once been ridden in. However, he by no means bought pictures and bric-à-brac merely to sell again. He liked his house in Bayswater, overlooking the gardens, to be one of the æsthetic show-places of London, and spent hundred of cards a year upon enthusiasts who were told it was the wrong thing not to have seen some Brown or Jones in the possession of Mr. Aristides. He spent little upon feasting, because that was in his partner's department ; but whenever he gave dinners they were at least as great works of art as his paintings,

and invitations to Madame's occasional receptions, where people were always allowed plenty of room to dance in, were things to be fought for. And all this came out of that little back office in Woodenhorse Yard, where nobody ever seemed to do anything, or to have anything to do, but consume sherry and cigars.

It was one of Madame's receptions to-night. It would have been easy to find more distinguished society under much humbler roofs; but there were quite enough good people with good reason for being there to attract still better people there also. And, at any rate, it had the merit of variety, for Mr. Aristides had the good sense to mix his guests well, without caring in the least who might meet whom. He might lose a few exceptionally strait-laced people that way, but not many, and hardly any worth keeping; and, for the rest, the more mixed the company, the more safe they are to enjoy themselves in their hearts, whatever they may think it right to say when the time comes for talking things over. Lord Ovoca, for instance, would not have enjoyed himself very much in

the society of his peers, nor many of them very much in his; while by bringing him together with half-a-dozen æsthetic republicans seven people were equally pleased. Fine ladies were enabled to flatter themselves that they might be mistaken for foreign singers, while they at the same time made the *haute noblesse* of Bohemia feel charitably towards those poor creatures of whom no stories can be told. For the true Bohemian longs in his or her inmost soul for the Philistine plains far more truly and honestly than the adventurous Philistine for the imaginary charms of Bohemia. Whenever you hear Bohemia praised and glorified, be sure that the praiser has never been really and truly there—unless, indeed, he be a Philistine fox who has lost his tail.

It was good of Mr. Aristides to amuse and interest his titled and moneyed friends by giving his artistic *clientèle* a respectable holiday. It was easy to account for the presence of most of the company. The connection of Mr. Aristides with many kinds of speculation, and his patronage of almost every branch of art—save only that of the *ballet*, which was

strictly in the department of Mr. Sinon—were amply sufficient reasons for an infinite number of individual cases. But still there were a few flies in amber even there—people whom nobody knew, who interested nobody, and perhaps could hardly themselves have given an account of how or why they had come.

There was, at any rate, one man who seemed to be in this position. He was near the door, looking about him as a mere stranger would, and without joining in the confused chatter, perpetually rising higher and higher in pitch, which on such an occasion reminds a cynical listener of nothing so much as of his last visit to a collection of cockatoos and macaws. He was a tall man, made lean and strong, with a grave, straight-featured, sun-browned face, and a large brown beard. Nothing about him told what he was, or in what part of the world he had been born, except that he was certainly not a countryman of Mr. Aristides. He looked as much, or as little, like one of the artists there, or one of the stock-brokers, as like a soldier, which is giving a tolerably wide margin. Without looking par-

ticularly interested or at all amused, he seemed entirely and unaffectedly at his ease, and quite content to be talking to nobody. But in that house it was next to impossible for anybody who had ever known anybody in his life—even if he were a stranger to London—to get through a whole evening without being run across by somebody whom he had known somewhere, for there was somebody there from almost everywhere.

‘Holloa !’ said a little man, otherwise unnoticeable, who was rather roughly rubbing the heat from his forehead on his way towards the door—‘you here ! Rather different from the last place we met in, eh ? Hotter in one way, but not in another ?’

The silent man in the doorway smiled slowly and pleasantly, and held out his hand. ‘Yes, I’m here. And so, if I’m not mistaken, are you. Yes, it’s different here, as you say. What brings *you* into this galley ?’

The little man shrugged his shoulders, almost like a Frenchman, though he was certainly not one. ‘That’s a long story. And you ?’

‘That’s a longer, Doctor. I wonder if anybody’s here without some sort of a why. It’s almost like the *Légion étrangère*. If I wanted plots for plays, I’d hang about this house, and make a fortune in no time.’

‘Or lose one,’ said the Doctor, shrugging his shoulders again. ‘But it’s true you might make one, if you had none to lose. I hope you’re not a man of property. If you’re not, I’m glad to meet you. If you are——’

The other frowned deeply for an instant, and then smiled again. ‘You seem to know the country, Dale. I like the look of it, rather. Standing in this doorway, it’s like taking a bird’s-eye view of the world.’

‘How long have you been in town? And if you’ve been long, why didn’t you look me up long ago, and have a good big talk about blood and bones?’

‘I’d have liked it, and I’ll have it too. But I’ve not been long over. I’ve been seeing how they do things in Spain. Why didn’t you come?’

‘Ah—you fellows have all the luck!’ sighed Dr. Dale. ‘As if I’d let Sark make

war on Scilly, if I could help it, without my being there to have a finger in the fun. But I'm a bandaged man. I've dropped into music, you see, since the good old times.'

' Into music—you? If you sing the old songs in the old way, you would make one sort of sensation: no doubt of that. But perhaps it's the cymbals or the drum?'

' Pooh! I mean I've got to look after the throats of twenty-seven opera women, and it's no sinecure, I can tell you. I'd rather saw off twenty legs a day.'

' Why don't you then? We hadn't a man who could cut off so much as a head properly where I've been: though we've had a good bit of throat-cutting, it's true.'

' *I* shall cut somebody's throat some day—and it will be a woman's. You see that fat old woman talking to Lord Ovoca? Her confounded pharynx gives me more bother than life's worth living for. If she fancies she feels a tickling for a minute, she goes to bed and sends for me; and before I'm at her house she's up again, and forgotten all about the matter. Some day she'll be

found with her throat cut—and I shall be hanged.'

'Then cut it, or hang her, and come.'

'I've done my best. I make a point of going to all my prettiest patients oftener than I need, just to make my wife order me to give up the theatre practice, and to insist on my going off to Spain to be out of harm's way. I've told her I've been to attend an alderman's gout, and then taken care to let her find out that I've been lying, and that I've been with some fascinating *soprano* all the while. But it's no use. She *won't* be jealous, do what I will.'

'Oh, if you're married—then I'll congratulate you with all my heart; and don't be a humbug, Dale. I conclude your long story means that you've got a wife whose company you prefer even to that of Carlist brigands, and that she doesn't want to get rid of you, and is too sharp to be jealous of women that aren't fit to tie the shoes of women like what Mrs. Dale is sure to be. Is she here?'

'She—Mrs. Dale?'

'Why not?'

‘ Do you think I’d bring my wife among my patients and my host’s customers? I’d sooner take her with me to Spain. No, no. Practice is practice: but one’s wife’s one’s wife, and home’s home.’

‘ Are they such a bad lot, then, that you and I have got among?’

‘ Bad?—No. No worse than you and I. But—well—when *you’re* married, you’ll know what I mean. No: they are not bad. My patients are very good: but then their good isn’t just everybody’s good, you know. In short, it’s another earth that goes round just as rightly as ours, only the opposite way. And with the City people it’s the same: the sort, I mean, like Aristides, and Sinon, and Skull.’

‘ Skull? What Skull?’

‘ I forgot—you can’t know the ins and outs as we do who live behind the scenes. Do you know the name? It isn’t a common one. No? Well, Gideon Skull’s a sort of a dark horse—something in the City, you know—I know him pretty well by meeting him here. He’s not what I call good form, you know.

He's rich. There are queer stories of his dealings in French stock and English rifles and army stores in our war—but I don't understand those things myself, so I can't say. Some people think he's a sleeping partner in Aristides and Sinon. Some say they're only his agents: some say he's only theirs. There are one or two people, besides myself, who say openly that they don't know. And that "don't know" is just the very point, you see. That's what it comes to with just nine-tenths of the people here. They've all got stories—nine-tenths of them. Very likely most of the stories are lies. But then lies aren't told of people who haven't got some real story, which may, as likely as not, be worse than the real one.'

' You're a charitable sort of a doctor, Dale, I must say.'

' Compared with others, I am.'

' Is Gideon Skull here to-night? I think it's quite possible he may be a man I used to know.'

' No; but you know him, do you? I didn't know that, you see, when I brought

him in by way of example. He may be a saint—I don't know ; perhaps you do. But that's it, after all. *I don't know.* It's nothing to me whom I visit as a patient ; but Practice is Practice, and Home's Home, you see. And it don't so much matter, after all, of course, between a man and a man. I've been hail-fellow-well-met with scores of men I know nothing of——'

‘Such as I, Doctor?’

‘Well, say such as you. But it's the women. If I brought Laura—that's Mrs. Dale—into the set—she'd have to know Mrs. Skull.’

‘Mrs. Skull? Do you mean to tell me that there is a woman in the world called Mrs. Gideon Skull?’

‘I do, though.’

‘And who, in the name of wonder, is she?’

‘Ah, you see, that's just the point! *I don't know.* And nobody knows.’

‘Lots of money, no doubt?’

‘Not a penny, they say.’

‘That's simply and absolutely impossible, Dale. Skull was always a bit of a rake, and

of course he might take up with any woman, money or no money ; but marry her without a cent—No !'

' Did I say he *had* married her ? '

' Didn't you ? '

' No ; you asked if there was a woman *called* Mrs. Gideon Skull, and I said there is. That's all.'

' Isn't he really married, then ? '

' There it is again—I *don't know*.'

' Do you know her ? '

' Yes ; pretty well.'

' Is she here to-night ? '

' Yes. Why ? '

' Because I haven't a Laura to think of, and because I have a great curiosity to see a woman to whom Gideon Skull has given his name. If she has made him marry her without a penny, she must be a wonder. Which is she ? '

' That young woman in black velvet, sitting near the piano. Some people think her a beauty ; but I don't know. Of course I'll introduce you, if you please.'

' If *you* please. I should like it very much

indeed. She doesn't look particularly wonderful, though, after all.'

He followed Dr. Dale to the piano, and was duly introduced to the young woman in black velvet.

'Mrs. Gideon Skull—allow me to introduce my friend, Mr. Walter Gray.'

CHAPTER XXIII.

A higher alt, a deeper bass,
She heareth as the dancers pass:—

Are not the moments flying?
Have we not heard them sighing?
Do we not see them dying?
Shall we not feel them sweet?
Summer hath lips that flatter:
Earth is of dust—what matter?
Bright is the bloom we scatter
Under our failing feet.

This is our wingèd story:
Summer is dumb with glory;
Name her—and snow-tide, hoary,
Heavy of heart, we meet:
Yea, by a word that's spoken,
Straight is our music broken—
Songs that are sung betoken
Silence for hearts that beat.

ANYBODY who had ever known Gideon would feel a little curious about the woman who, without a penny (if gossip were true), had reduced him to marriage in any shape or form. Oddly enough it almost seemed to Mr. Walter Gray as if he had met her before somewhere, some-

when or other. It was not unlikely; having known the husband, it was natural enough that he should have come across one with whom Gideon must have been acquainted for some longer or shorter time before marrying her. The more he looked, the more sure he felt in one way, and the more doubtful in others. All the lady acquaintances of Gideon whom he had ever known had been either Americans—which Mrs. Skull certainly was not—or else in America; and there was no place or set of circumstances in the American part of his memory with which he could associate her. And then they had seldom, if ever, been ladies except by an extravagantly courteous stretch of conventional terms; while she, he was sure, was a lady bred and born—at any rate in the conventional sense, if not in any more satisfactory one. At first sight, she was not the kind of young woman whom he would expect to disprove her ladyhood by catching a man like Gideon for the sake of a fortune. Of course it might be for love; but then, men cannot be expected to see one another with women's eyes, and never can be made to quite

understand how any men but themselves can make women fall in love with them. They are bound to accept facts, of course ; but scarcely even these when the love-winner is so unlike themselves as Gideon Skull was unlike Walter Gray. She interested him at once, for all these reasons, but even more because she looked like one of those women who have a story—not merely told about them by others, like half the women in the room, but written on her lips and in her eyes. To pique curiosity by looking interesting is the great secret with which some very plain women have learned to rule the world. Mrs. Skull was very far from plain. But the story which her eyes and her lips expressed to the sight without speaking to the mind, like a poem in an unknown tongue, already half explained to Walter Gray the fascination she had no doubt exercised over Gideon, though nothing, apart from wealth, could interpret his attraction for her.

His introduction to her did not interrupt any conversation, for she was sitting as much alone at the end of the piano as he had been at the door. He noticed that she did not give

him the usual smile of greeting. She only bowed rather coldly, and waited, with a discouraging air of indifference, for him to say anything he pleased. Perhaps she had nothing to say. It is often the way with people whose eyes seem to say a great deal—which so constantly turns out to be a vast quantity of nothing.

‘I had the—hm!—pleasure, of knowing Mr. Skull a long time ago,’ he said, ‘though very likely he wouldn’t remember even my name. Will he be here to-night?’

‘No,’ she said. ‘I think not, at least. He hardly ever goes out, and is very busy.’

Her voice, with its quiet indifference of tone, did not help his memory. It only satisfied him that she was very thoroughly an English-woman; and made him guess—though he certainly could not have told how or why—that she was as indifferent to her husband’s comings and goings as she was to being questioned about them by a stranger. Clearly, Walter Gray had something of a woman’s way of seeing a great deal in a very little.

‘I see they are going to waltz. Will you——’

‘I don’t dance.’

‘Then, in that case, nor do I.’ ‘I wonder,’ he began to think, ‘how she really did manage to catch Gideon. It’s true he never danced either; but, all the same, she’s no more in his line than if he waltzed like an Austrian. Do you know, Mrs. Skull, I have got a fancy that troubles me; and I can neither waltz nor rest in any other way till I’ve told it to you.’

These receptions of Mrs. Aristides—as her husband’s assemblies of his *clientèle* were technically called—generally ended with a sudden happy thought on the part of somebody to extemporise a ball. But it never had to depend upon the piano for inspiration. Impromptu as it always was, there never failed to be a certain number of distinguished musicians present, and the various collections of Mr. Aristides comprised one of instruments ready to their hands, with which they were never too proud to add to the pleasure of such good company. For from Mr. Aristides even pipers and fiddlers got—or thought they

got—rather more than they gave. But a reputation for impromptu dances, with real musicians with real names to play the tunes, was well worth the few guineas for concert tickets which it cost their host in the year. Just then a bright and lively waltz started out in splendid form from what might almost be called an orchestra, which made up for its smallness by spirit and style. Mrs. Skull must be free from the dancing fever indeed not to break through her rule. ‘Yes ; Gideon *would* be just the man to object to his wife’s waltzing with anybody but himself,’ thought Walter Gray. He waited for her to ask him about his fancy ; but as she seemed as indifferent to it as to dancing, he was obliged to take her question as made.

‘I can’t get it out of my head, Mrs. Skull, that I have met you before.’

‘Indeed ; I don’t think that likely. I know very few of Mr. Skull’s friends.’

‘Yes ;’ he thought, ‘just the man to object to his wife knowing his friends. A reformed rake always makes the most jealous husband. I wonder why he lets her come to this place alone—or at all ; old Dale wasn’t a

rake, and even he keeps Laura at home when he goes out for fun.' 'But, all the same,' he went on, 'I feel I have seen you somewhere. Of course I know that one's always meeting women, and men too, whom one used to know intimately in some other world before one was born. That's always happening to everybody every day. But I don't mean anything so commonplace as that, you know. I mean in this world. Have you ever been in America ?'

'No—never. I have never even—'

'Then, that won't do. In Paris perhaps?'

'I have never been in Paris.'

'You have never been in Paris? Impossible! Why, I never heard of anybody who had never been to Paris. But perhaps in Rome?'

'I have never been to Rome.'

'In Venice, then? In Vienna? In Berlin?'

'No; I have never—'

'Let me see. Not in Athens—certainly; I couldn't forget if I'd met your there. Could it possibly have been in Cairo?'

'I have never been out of England since I was born.'

‘Please don’t think me a boor, Mrs. Skull, to be cross-examining you in this way. I can’t have met you anywhere, then, that’s clear—unless I’ve passed you by some chance in the street in London, and remembered your face—which is a thing that I never do. I was never meant to be a king—I can remember some things very well, all sorts of useless ones; but in remembering faces I am a perfect fool. I have to see a face at least three times to have a chance of knowing it again; I am always cutting my best friends, and so losing them; and I don’t believe I should know my own very self if I were to see him anywhere but in a mirror. But—yes, I do seem to remember yours, some way. Not you, but something about you—a sort of you not mixed up with any place where I have seen people, but in some quiet way—well, I’ve not had many quiet ways in my life, so it may have been in some other world before I was born, after all.’

‘*You* seem to have been a great traveller, Mr. Gray.’

‘She has said something of her own at last!’ thought he. ‘Not that it amounts to

much. But—Yes, or rather no; I have been a traveller, but certainly not a great one. I am a man with a great incapacity for sitting still. Yesterday in Spain—to-morrow in London—to-day in *Cosmos*, judging from the varieties of all nations who are spinning round us. Ah! this *is* a waltz; you ought to dance, Mrs. Skull. It stops thinking; and thinking is the worst thing in the world for the brain. Why, look at Dale; even he is dancing. He is another whom I used to know as a confirmed bachelor, and whom I find turned into a married man. I should never have thought that of—Dale.'

‘Why not of him?’

‘Because he was a man of just one idea when I knew him; and it certainly was not of the sort that leads to marriage. He didn’t care for money, and he didn’t care for comfort—in fact, he didn’t care for anything on earth beyond an all-devouring passion for standing in the middle of a storm of bullets without an umbrella, and cutting off people’s legs. That meant perfect happiness for him, and everything else meant misery. That isn’t the

real Dale at all whom you see dressed up there in evening clothes and making himself hot and red with dancing, and fussy with chattering. The real man is as cool and as silent as the North Pole, and that only happens when he's cutting legs instead of capers, to the music of rifles instead of fiddles. When he's himself, there's no finer fellow alive. War isn't all evil, Mrs. Skull. It brings out the best of a man, and unmasks the worst of him, and makes him what nature meant him to be. Peace, I'm a great deal too certain, does just the other things. What do we know about all these people here? To do that, we must turn it into another ball before Waterloo.'

'What war was it,' asked she, with a shade of interest in her voice, 'that made you acquainted with Dr. Dale?'

He had been trying to interest her; but her interest fell a little into the wrong line when it at last showed signs of coming. He had reached the point of mounting a pet hobby of all who have seen war—not too far off to understand its grandeur as the greatest of living forces, and not so near as to see

nothing but their own sorrows. She ought not to have checked him so suddenly with a question about a merely personal detail. However, he dismounted gracefully. The question was stupid; but why should he expect Mrs. Skull herself to be otherwise?

‘At the siege of Paris. The very last time I saw him he was himself, and under circumstances that you wouldn’t think it nice to hear described. It’s an odd sensation to meet him here.’

‘You were at the siege of Paris?’ she asked. The question belonged to the common forms of talk; but something in its tone suddenly opened his ears, and he looked at her with new eyes. All her scarcely courteous indifference had given place to what sounded like eager anxiety. With his faculty for noticing lights and shades, he felt as if he had read a word of her story, unintelligible without the context, but suggesting what the whole might be—for stories which write themselves in faces are always sad ones.

‘Yes,’ he said, a little vexed with himself for having possibly touched some wound or

other, and for having been guilty of such a blunder as to speak admiringly of war to a woman—that is to say, to one who could have known nothing of war save its personal and sorrowful side. ‘And I saw the end. You mustn’t think, Mrs. Skull, that I am as blood-thirsty in my tastes as Dale. One gets to talk lightly of such things because no language has got words strong enough and deep enough to speak of them seriously. I can talk well enough about war in the large way, which concerns mankind—that is, all the people for whom one doesn’t care; but how can one talk at all about the way it comes home to oneself: as it did to me and thousands more?’ ‘She mustn’t think me a cold-blooded, unsympathetic, philosophical brute,’ he thought.

‘I hate war,’ said she; but in such a tone as to make him think himself mistaken in the nature of her interest in any particular war, or as if she were practised in habitual self-repression and felt bound to correct any sign of emotion which she might have chanced to betray.

‘So do I,’ said he, ‘in one way—though

hate is terribly like love when the fever-fit is on. Yes ; I can't keep away from the air that breeds the fever, after once having breathed it, even now, though it cost me the life of the only human being I ever cared very much about—of course except myself—and the best and finest fellow I ever knew. I don't want you to think that when I praise war it is in the way that poets praise passion—because I don't know what it means. I do know. I have drunk the dregs of it as well as the wine. I have seen a man—the man I spoke of—*murdered* in war; not fighting for his country or any cause that concerned him, but killed because war, which turns many weak men into grand heroes, turns more commonplace nobodies into fiends. This man should have had a long life of happiness and honour. He had no more business with the French and the Germans than Dale has with a London ball-room. And he was killed because the Americans—who were as little to him as the French and Germans—wanted news, which he never could learn how to give them: and because war lets loose tigers as well as sets lions free.'

‘When you were at the siege of Paris,’ said she, again bringing down the flight of his oration to the level of a woman’s world, ‘did you ever happen to meet with a correspondent of an American newspaper named Alan Reid?’

‘Good God! Why, he was the man! Mrs. Skull—God forgive me!—what have I said? what have I done?’

‘My brother—Alan——’

He heard no more than half the cry, as she sprang up from her seat, and covered her eyes with her hands—trembling, as if a ghost had suddenly appeared before her. The waltz went on, wildly and joyfully. None noticed her who was learning for the first time that the brother, for whose sake she lived, had died.

Yes—Walter Gray knew well enough where he had seen her now. But he did not wonder how or why he had not known her again. He did not remember faces; and the passing of many events had made those two meetings vague things of long ago. There was but little left of the girl with whom he had been shut up in the belfry; little indeed of her who

had crushed him with her scorn in the church-yard. Even had she been less changed in her whole self, it would have been hard enough to associate this lady in black velvet in the drawing-room of a Mr. Aristides with one's memories of Helen Reid of Copleston—Mrs. Gideon Skull. How had such a thing as that come to pass? Walter Gray would as soon have thought of discovering a likeness in the royal wife of King Cophetua to Penelophon the beggar-maid. But now he knew that it was she.

But then, how was it she had never known of her brother's death till now? It had happened long ago. Even if Mr. Crowder had been too sublimely above trifles which could not affect the interests of the '*Argus*' to let her and her mother hear of it, still it must have been a scrap of public news for its hour. He had ample time to think and feel all this, and to swear at himself for the accident which had told her all without preparation, in such a place and in such a way, for he had not a word to say, and no living man could have found a fit one.

But suddenly she left off trembling, took her hands from her face, and looked at him with a strange, hard look, in which he could recall no sign of Helen Reid.

‘He was my only brother,’ she said, in a voice that was like her look. ‘And I thought he was still living—strange as it must seem to you. You must forgive me for having seemed a little sorry. It was very bad taste and quite out of place; but I assure you it was not because I don’t know how absurd and contemptible such things as feelings, and all that sort of rubbish, are. As a matter of curiosity, I should like to know when my only brother died.’

‘Good God! Don’t speak—don’t look like that, Miss Reid. Forgive *me*—no, not that; only—’

‘I assure you I would not for a moment think of putting the music out by screaming or fainting—perfect calmness is one’s first duty to society. I think you ought to be obliged to me for not making such a disagreeable thing as a scene. Tell me, if you please, when my brother died.’

‘ My poor friend——’

‘ He is not poor now; and men don’t have friends.’

‘ He was struck down on the street, almost at my side, on the 29th of January. For God’s sake, Miss Reid, take my arm, and leave this room. Let me see you home.’

‘ I am going—home. But please do not leave the room. I am not the least ill, and I can walk alone to my—my husband’s carriage perfectly well. Forgive me if I have been—seemed impolite to you. I dare say you were his friend—I dare say he had nothing that you wanted—and he—Good night——’

She left him suddenly and hurriedly, as if she were not quite so much mistress of herself as she had been trying, with ill success enough, to make him believe. He had not learned a single word of her real story, that was clear. Helen Reid the wife of Gideon Skull! He did not let her see that he followed her, but he took care not to lose sight of her until she was in her carriage; and then he watched the carriage till he could follow it with his eyes no longer.

‘Well, Gray,’ said Dr. Dale, ‘how did you get on with Mrs. Skull? Rather heavy to lift, isn’t she?’

‘You never told me she is the sister of poor young Reid.’

‘Is she? I’m sure I didn’t know. Poor young fellow! I suppose that’s why she’s always in mourning. Then it’s true Skull married without a penny, for Reid hadn’t any money, I’ll swear. But, do you know, I fancy there’s something about to-night out of the common. There’s a sort of a feeling of thunder in the financial air. Stock has gone up or down. I hope you’re not interested in that sort of thing?’

‘Is Mrs. Skull a patient of yours?’

‘No. I wish she were. But what makes you so desperately interested in Mrs. Skull? She’s neither a stock nor a share, but another man’s wife, you know.’

‘Yes—Gideon Skull’s wife, and Alan Reid’s sister. It’s a queer world this; so I’ll wish it good-night—till to-morrow.’

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.







